On the Grounds Where We Feel Safe

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/17934359.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham, Will Graham's Dogs, Will Graham's Father, Abigail Hobbs, Alana Bloom, Jack Crawford, Bella Crawford
Additional Tags:	Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics, Alpha Will Graham, Omega Hannibal Lecter, Adopted Children, Adopted Abigail Hobbs, Dark Abigail Hobbs, Dark Will Graham, Will Graham Knows, Someone Help Will Graham, Unresolved Romantic Tension, Emotional Manipulation, Sexual Manipulation, Hannibal Lecter is a Cannibal, Hannibal Lecter is the Chesapeake Ripper, Abigail Hobbs is a Cannibal, Will Graham is a Cannibal, Flashbacks, Non-Linear Narrative, Angst, Hormonal Dynamics Consistent With A/B/O, Minor Character Death, Alternate Universe - Babysitters, Possessive Behavior, POV Alternating, Top Will Graham, Bottom Hannibal Lecter, Knotting, Bonding, Mating Bond, Mating Bites, Biting, Blood Drinking
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2019-02-27 Completed: 2019-03-16 Words: 36,059 Chapters: 5/5

On the Grounds Where We Feel Safe

by HigherMagic

Summary

"Single Omega household seeking a primary caretaker for high-school aged female. Must own vehicle for chauffeuring, errands, and other duties as necessary. Room and board provided, and a stipend for necessities available for negotiation. Must have open availability and be willing to submit to a background check and drug test. Immediate start." Then a name, and a phone number. Doctor Hannibal Lecter.

Notes

/rubs forehead
you know when you watch something and you just KNOW your brain is going to make an AU from it? yeah, that happened. Title comes from Nevermore's "Go To War" which honestly? Is a whole-ass mood, and a very good murder husbands breakup/honeypot!Will song.

this story is not linear! you will be thrown back and forth, past and present, until the final puzzle piece slots into place.

I didn't know what else to tag it, hopefully you'll get a better idea from this first chapter, but Hannibal definitely Pulls Some Shit. I don't think it's any worse than what he did in 'First' in regards to, like, ABO-esque manipulation, but it'll become more fleshed out as time goes on. If you have any questions please feel free to message me here or on Tumblr and I'll happily answer!

I hope you guys like it so far!

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: 【杯拔】在我们感到安全的地方 by Shaxi

Chapter 1

Will staggers into his home, wincing at the slam of his front door as he shoves it shut. His head hurts, a blinding pain stuck behind his eyes, and he covers them with one hand, shaking his head vehemently to try and rid himself of the desperate, deep ache that sits in the back of his throat, curls and presses behind his teeth.

In his chest, a frantic howling; *Go home, go home, this isn't home!*

The house smells wrong – too much like him, and dogs, and his entire being shudders with revulsion at the fact that he notices. Here, there is no lingering scent of sweetness; no old books, syrupy wine, the bright aftertaste of a female. There is nothing but dogs, and himself, crass and stale and bitter. He sets his teeth on their edges as Winston whines, nudging his free hand.

"Go away," he snaps, wincing when Winston huffs, but obeys, nails clicking on the floor as he goes to the pile of dog beds and joins his brothers and sisters. Will hisses, swallowing back a sharp growl, and takes his bottle of whiskey from his tiny dinner table. So small, so unwelcoming – everything looks sharp and cold as frosted glass.

He snarls to himself, uncaps the whiskey bottle and throws the lid into his fireplace. Tips it back, and drinks, and drinks, until it burns his throat and soothes the ache in his chest, replaces it with the undeniable heat of alcohol. He drinks until it's empty and, with another snarl, chucks it towards his kitchen. Doesn't flinch at the shatter of glass, but he goes and closes the door, so none of the dogs try to investigate.

He turns, and presses his back to the door, sliding down to his heels. His hands go through his hair, tugging, and he lets out a sharp, loud whine. Fuck, *fuck*. Everything is wrong, everything aches in him, a desperate need to turn tail and run, back to Baltimore, back to the place he had started to call 'Home', in his head. A place with his mate, and his daughter.

Animals.

Murderers.

He doesn't know what to do. Everything is off-angle, sent careening off the side of a cliff and he aches, *God* does he ache. His teeth itch, his stomach clenches, the muscles of his thighs are quivering with the need to run. He's sweating, and not even the alcohol can touch the viscerally-outraged part of his skull that howls and pants and seeks sweetness, seeks laughter and brightness and joy.

Buster trots over to him, nosing at his knees, and Will sighs, but the sound is more like a sob. Winston comes after, and Will rises, and for lack of anything else to do, goes to the mattress in his living room. He pulls the sheets, the duvet, the pillows off it, and piles them on top of the dog beds, pushing them with his heels and hands until they form a miniature nest.

His mother used to do this, when he didn't feel well, or when he went into heat. Will is an Alpha, and has no biological imperative to nest, but he doesn't know what else to do. He crawls into the makeshift thing, curls up tightly on himself and shivers despite the clinging warmth, the scent of dog. It's wrong, it's wrong, it doesn't smell like his pack. There is no Omega scent lingering in this place, no sweetness for his daughter – Will is alone, here. Alone, and aching, and getting very close to drunk.

Maybe he'll die from it, poison his blood and reclaim his inedible status. His heart thrums in his chest, like a fish on a line, desperately fighting the pull of the hook in his mouth. He rubs his hands over his lips, down his neck, and wonders which part of him they would have eaten first.

There is no bite on his neck, no bond to force him to go back home, but he doesn't need one. They did this – they lured him and trapped him, drove him rabid with the desire to care for them. They did that to him, tugged on his instincts and wove his needs into a tapestry of their own making.

He thinks of his mate, his soft purr, the way he'd touched Will's shoulders and back, the way he'd shown his neck – only when it pleased him, only when he knew Will needed to see it. Manipulative. Placating. He thinks of his daughter's bright laugh, thinks of the light in her eyes when Will had taken her fishing. Thinks of all the things they said around the dinner table when Will didn't understand Italian. Secrets, hidden in plain sight.

He thinks of the meat he'd eaten at their table, and his stomach turns. He whines, loud enough to draw the attention of his dogs, and grabs for Winston, pulling him close. The animal goes with a huff, tucking his cool nose beneath Will's neck, tail swishing once as Will buries his face in Winston's scruff and sobs.

How could he have been so fucking *blind*.

The heart monitor's beeping is starting to get aggravating. It scrapes along Will's sensitive ears, digs nails into the nape of his neck. He grits his teeth, jaw bulging. The soft *chk-woosh* of the breathing machine next to him is a gentle counterpoint, but it doesn't cover up the sound of the heart monitor. Doesn't erase the sharp stench of sick Omega from the room.

His mother coughs, huffing in displeasure, and wipes his hand over his mouth. There's a tube tied to his nose, and his breathing is labored. They removed the one from his mouth and woke him up, so that Will could say his 'Goodbye's.

He takes his other hand, folds it in both his own, and brings it to his lips, brushing over the knuckles. His mother's head rolls, seeking him out. One of his eyes is shadowed, greyed-out. The other is the same bright blue Will has always remembered – the same one he inherited. Chemotherapy has robbed him of his hair, made his face sallow and sagging, and the cancer that wouldn't be beaten back has done the rest. Will remembers watching his mother fix boat

engines, haul wood, always strong, even after Will matured. He never was one to let his Alpha son pick up the slack, until he got sick.

His thin lips twitch, and he sighs. "Hi, Rou," he murmurs. Will's breath catches, and his hands tighten around his mother's, sorrow and pain welling up in his throat, behind his eyes. His mother has always called him 'Rou', short for 'Rougarou' – a shapeshifting predator from his Cajun roots. Will has often wondered if his mother was afraid of him, to nickname him after something so dangerous. Or maybe it made him feel safe at night, to know Will was there, keeping watch.

"Hi, daddy," Will replies, and feels suddenly like he's five years old, and afraid of thunderstorms. His mother used to sing him to sleep on nights like that, cuddled up together in that old leather armchair. He has always called his mother 'Dad', despite his Omega status. It didn't seem right to call him anything else.

His lips twitch again, and he sighs. "Not long now," he says, and another cough rattles his chest. Will closes his eyes, refusing to let his tears fall, and presses his forehead to his mother's knuckles. "Hey, hey now, look at me."

Will obeys.

Between his hands, his mother's fingers twitch, and tighten. "You don't need to take care'a me no more," he rasps, and Will swallows, ducks his eyes and rubs his thumb along the corner of his mouth. "Time for you to find your own way. Get a mate, a kid." He coughs, and huffs again. "I stopped you doin' that, and that's on me, but you gotta make yourself a pack, now. Find a good mate."

Will whines. "I don't need a mate or a kid," he says, watches his mother's lashes flutter, his lips twitch in a sad smile. Will has gentled his accent since he was a child, but he always reverts back when speaking to his mother, a chameleon, a shapeshifter to the last. "You ain't responsible for my shit, daddy. Not a burden, never have been."

He gets a huff, for that, and a roll, so that he's lying on his side. He pats Will's cheek gently, forces their eyes to meet again.

"Doesn't matter anymore," he says softly. He's getting weaker now – once he falls asleep, he won't wake back up. Will's eyes burn, and he can't hold back tears anymore. Pain echoes in the hollow of his chest, burns him from the inside out, and his tears sting his cheeks. His mother's lips twitch again, he breathes in deeply and the machines beep away. He swipes a thumb through Will's tears, cleaning them. "Come now, none'a that. What're you cryin' for?"

Will shakes his head, lets out a helpless gasp. "I don't know," he replies. Because this has been coming, for a long time. Long enough for Will to get his shit together. "'M just." He breathes out, buries his face in his mother's hand. "I'm gonna miss you."

He laughs. "Don't you worry, little Rou," he says, and pats Will's cheek again. Then, he sighs, and rolls onto his back. His breathing is getting labored. "I'll stick around, for a while. Not gonna let a Goddamn tumor stop me seeing my grandbabies."

Will chokes on a sound, stuck between a laugh and a sob. He shakes his head, kisses his mother's hand, and places it back on the side of the bed. He rises from his chair, cups the back of his head, and leans down to press a kiss to his cool forehead. Breathes in, wanting to capture his scent for the last time, and feels his mother's head tilt up, seeking his neck for one last soothing lungful of his Alpha child.

Then, Will lets him go, presses their foreheads together, and sighs. "Go to sleep, daddy," he murmurs, and forces himself to purr. Watches, as his mother's eyes close, and he sighs. Will bites his lower lip hard to stop himself whining, rubs his hands over his mouth, and leaves the room.

He brushes the tears off his cheeks, meets the eyes of the nurse lingering by the door, and she gives him a thin smile. "We'll make him as comfortable as possible," she says. Will nods, and bites back the urge to snap that that doesn't fucking mean anything.

There are a set of three chairs on the other side of the hall, and Will goes to them. He won't leave, not until he gets confirmation that his mother has passed. He won't leave him alone here. He curls up, heels at the edge of the chair, and runs his hands through his hair. Again, and over again, and he's sure he's putting out the scent of distressed Alpha heavily, but he can't make himself stop. He listens to that aggravating rhythm of the heart monitor, listens to the breathing machine, the intercom, the bustle of other nurses and doctors around the hospital as they pass him.

Then, coffee, and a shadow at his side. He looks up and sees Alana standing in front of the second chair, two cups of to-go coffee in her hand. She smiles at him, and offers him one in silence, and he takes it, holding it against his knees.

She sits beside him, sipping her own, the scent of chai and almond milk covering up the stench of sickness clinging to the place. Will's own is black, a little bitter, just as he likes it, and he breathes in deep and remembers the scent of his mother's coffee, remembers him putting in so much sweetener and milk that it more closely resembled sandy water by the end.

Alana merely sits, letting him mourn in silence. Her perfume is gentle, vanilla and jasmine.

"Have you seen him yet?" she asks, after another long moment.

Will nods, his lips curling back. He drags his knuckles against his teeth and squeezes his eyes tightly shut, bowing his head. Alana is a grief counsellor by trade, a family therapist on the backburner, and Will doesn't know if she's here as that, or as his friend, but he can't stand the thought of talking to her about it in either capacity.

He clears his throat, and rasps, "Won't be long now."

She nods.

He breathes out shakily, runs a hand through his hair and pulls. "*Fuck*."

He takes off the lid of his coffee, tilts it up and drains half the cup in a series of long swallows, ignoring the burn on the roof of his mouth and over his tongue. He hears, suddenly,

the absence of the heart monitor. The stop of the breathing machine as it's disconnected.

More tears come, and he exhales heavily, closes his eyes and puts the lid back on the coffee so he doesn't accidentally spill it everywhere. Alana's hand touches his knee, and he breaks – a single, shaken sob, he turns to her and buries it in her hair, lets her wrap an arm around him and hold him tightly as he clutches at her.

She hums, gently, a soft tune of a song he doesn't recognize, petting through his hair as he buries his face in her neck.

They're interrupted when the nurse leaves the room. She spots Will immediately, and he straightens, wiping his face and vainly trying to get control over his breathing. "Mister Graham," she says gently, approaching them. "Would you like to see him again?"

Will shakes his head. He will not let the last sight of his mother be him cold, lifeless. He's had his fill of death. The nurse nods, her face sorrowful and pale with understanding, and she looks to Alana. Her eyes drop to the wedding ring around her finger. "Are you his wife? Would you like to see him?"

Alana presses her lips together, and shakes her head. "She's not my wife," Will snaps, and pushes himself to his feet, tossing the rest of his coffee in a nearby trashcan. He barely hears the nurse's apology, or Alana's calming voice. He can't stay here anymore.

Will stirs as he hears the door open. His head is pounding, for two reasons now, and he groans and rolls away from the shards of light coming in from his front windows. Breathes deep, and whines at the sweet scents that greet him.

So, they came for him after all. Of course they did – he's a loose end.

He expects it to be quick. A knife at his throat, a swift tug, dead and gone. It would be nicer, he thinks, to die quickly, than to linger on.

The nest dips, and he closes his eyes tighter, shakes his head as he feels Winston rise to make room. Breathes in, whimpers at the scent of the man and child he had cared for so deeply, loved so much. Despite his fear, despite that terrible sting in his heart, he is soothed by them. A warm, broad chest presses to his back, and in front of him, another weight comes, and he opens his eyes.

Sees, in front of him, wide blue eyes. Pink cheeks from the wind outside. A mouth tilted up in a sad smile, and a long streak of dark hair. Abigail. He moans when, from behind him, a strong arm wraps around his chest, pulling him closer. A soft brush of lips to the nape of his neck.

"Are you going to kill me?" he asks, and hates how hoarse his voice is.

The arm around him tightens, slides up to his throat. Choking, then. Perhaps it's fitting – he dares not breathe, dares not take in the scents of his mate and daughter, doesn't want the last thing he sees, he smells, to be them.

"No, darling," a voice replies. Hannibal. Will shudders from head to toe when he's kissed, at his neck. He wonders if the clamor of alarm bells in his head is his mother, or perhaps just the innate instinct to protect himself.

He shows his teeth, tenses at the brush of a warm hand along his collarbones. "You should," he murmurs. But oh, the scent of them is soothing, calming the raging desperation that has built up in his throat and behind his eyes. Even his hangover is soothed under the touch of his mate.

Abigail's hand is on his cheek – he knows the difference, breathes in her scent and feels her hand, dainty and gentle. He opens his eyes, because he can't resist the urge, and her own are bright with tears. She presses her lips together, her head on one of the folded dog beds, and sighs.

She leans in, cups his face, and Will whimpers when her lips touch his sweaty forehead. She breathes in, and makes a quiet, distressed sound. "He smells sick, mama," she says.

Behind him, Hannibal nods. Breathes in at Will's neck. Maybe he'll bite Will, now. Tear him to shreds with his dangerous teeth. Will can't help the way he swallows, and tilts his head, baring his throat. Hannibal's purr vibrates between them, his hand slides gentle and slow down Will's chest to rest over his heart once more.

"Give me a moment with your father," he says.

Abigail nods, and pulls back. She clicks her tongue and the dogs rise, and Will whines, surging upright. He reaches for her.

"No," he says, grasping desperately at the sleeve of her long, pink shirt. Such a soft color, but all Will can think of is meat when he sees it. "Please. Don't go."

She bites her lower lip, her eyes sliding between Hannibal and Will.

"Please don't go," he begs again. He can't let her leave – he has to protect her. He has to make sure she's okay, he has to immerse himself in her scent again and make sure she's alright. Her worry coats him like a second skin. When she doesn't move, he finally turns, and meets Hannibal's eyes. Finds them dark, amber and gold. "Please."

Hannibal's lips purse, and he nods, and Abigail slackens, climbing back into the nest. Will breathes a sigh of relief, and wraps his arms around her, pulling her to his chest and resting his nose to her straight, black hair. She clings to him in turn, makes a soft, happy noise, and Will clenches his eyes tightly shut and wonders if it's possible to die from relief.

Will doesn't read the newspaper often. His mother used to, sitting in his big leather chair, idly commenting on the politics or pending storm of the day while Will made his lures. Even when he was sick, he insisted on keeping up with current events, and Will would bring him the paper while he was in hospital. Read it to him, when his vision started to go. Then he stopped, when he started to realize his mother spent most of their time together asleep.

The advertisement catches his eye, though, for its dark bold-type. It reads;

"Single Omega household seeking a primary caretaker for high-school aged female. Must own vehicle for chauffeuring, errands, and other duties as necessary. Room and board provided, and a stipend for necessities available for negotiation. Must have open availability and be willing to submit to a background check and drug test. Immediate start." Then a name, and a phone number. *Doctor Hannibal Lecter*.

He cannot say what made him decide to call. Maybe a desperate need to fill the endless void of his days, currently. Maybe because he'd have to sell his house to cover the damn hospital bills and funeral expenses. Maybe because taking care of an Omega is something he's been doing for years, now, and the idea of a daughter that is already fully-formed, to watch over, will soothe the awful ache in his chest seeking something to take care of. Maybe it was a whim, a stroke of chance, that led him down this path.

"This is Doctor Lecter," the voice says on the second ring.

"Hi, Doctor Lecter," Will replies, clearing his throat and shifting his weight. "My name is Will Graham. I saw your ad in the paper, and was wondering if you were still in the market for a caretaker."

A short silence. A soft hum. "Yes," Hannibal says, and Will smiles, already somewhat settled at the sound of the Omega's voice. "Are you able to come to my office for an interview?"

"Free and clear," Will replies.

"Excellent. Is this your cell phone?"

"Yes, Sir," Will says again, because Doctor Lecter sounds like the kind of person he should say 'Sir' to.

"Wonderful. I shall text you the address. Please come by at four today." Will nods. "I'll see you later, Will."

"Okay. Thanks. See you," Will replies, and then the call ends. Soon after, he receives a text telling him the address of the office, and winces internally. It's in Baltimore, which is going to be a bitch of a commute, but if all he has to do is school runs and after-school ferrying, it's manageable. He's certainly done worse for less.

Will falls asleep, at some point, and when he wakes, Abigail and Hannibal are gone. He surges upright, panting, frantically feeling for a trace of their warmth, their scent, anything to tell him that it hadn't been a fever dream, that his mate and daughter are here.

He hears his dogs barking, and sees that they are not in the room with him – outside. He rises on unsteady feet, sweating and flushed, and goes to the window to see Abigail playing with Winston and Addy, pulling on a rope toy as they fight to get it for themselves. She's laughing.

He breathes out, settled despite himself, and turns when he catches the scent of food cooking. Despite what he knows, his stomach aches sharply in hunger, and he goes to the kitchen, pressing the door open silently.

Hannibal is there. He's shed his coat and suit jacket, rolled his sleeves up to his forearms, and he's barefoot. Will has seen him like this so many times before, and he swallows, letting out a little whine before he can stop himself.

Hannibal turns, and smiles warmly at him. "Hello, darling," he purrs, and Will sags against the door. He wants to go to him, wants it so desperately.

His eyes fall. "There was glass," he says weakly.

"Yes, I noticed. I've cleaned it up," Hannibal replies. Of course he did, otherwise he wouldn't be barefoot.

Will's eyes gravitate to the oven. He sees onions and green peppers being sautéed, smells chicken. Or it might be chicken – he can't trust his nose when it comes to food anymore. "Is that my last meal?" he asks.

Hannibal's eyes flash, and he sighs, shaking his head. "I'm not going to kill you, Will," he replies, like this notion is ridiculous.

"But you were," Will says. "At some point."

Hannibal doesn't deny it.

"When did that change?"

Hannibal hums, turning his attention back to the onions and peppers. He stirs it with a wooden spoon, and adds it, after a moment, to a large pot wherein the chicken is cooking. "The conference I attended," he says. Will frowns – that was hardly a month into his employment, and he's been with them for several since. "I left you alone with Abigail. When I returned, the things she told me…" He looks back at Will, and smiles. "Well."

"I didn't do anything to her," Will snaps, showing his teeth. Hannibal's brows rise.

"I know," he replies gently. "That is precisely my point."

Will frowns. His head hurts. He wants to go to Hannibal and bury his nose in Hannibal's neck, wants to breathe in his scent. It will soothe him, he knows it will. He resists. Barely.

"You're not the first person I have hired to see to Abigail's needs while I'm away," Hannibal continues, and looks back to the food. He doesn't fear Will – eagerly turns his back and shows the nape of his neck. Whatever predatory stereotype is in Alphas, Hannibal doesn't see it in Will. Which, Will supposes, was the whole point. "Some of them treated her far less kindly than you did. Some of them were, well, tolerable, I suppose, but uninteresting." He pauses, and his nostrils flare. "Others still tried to do unforgivable things, to both of us."

Will snarls, unbidden. Abigail and Hannibal are *his*. He would kill anyone who tried to hurt them.

Which, again, was precisely the point.

"You bonded with her quickly," Hannibal adds. "And with me. You have a naturally paternal instinct, Will, one that I found myself eagerly wanting to encourage."

"It's all a lie," Will growls. Hannibal lifts his head and regards him with dark eyes, thin lips. "Everything you did. Everything you both did. You were just…*what*?" He grimaces. "Sweetening my meat?"

Hannibal sighs. "I never lied to you, Will," he says gently. "Not once."

He didn't, sure – maybe. Just encouraged Will to bond with him and his daughter. Purred when Will pleased him, touched his neck and smiled when Will made Abigail laugh. And she – she was the lure. The test. The triumph and reward, if Will played his part.

Hannibal turns away, and Will watches him open a container of rice, and add it dry to the mixture of meat, onions, and green peppers. He adds a packet of spices as well, and Will's nostrils flare, his stomach rumbling.

He licks his lips, and wonders, even as he asks it, if he'll regret it; "Was any of it real?"

Hannibal's hands go still. He might be thinking, just like Will is, of the candlelit conversations they have shared, the talks of entropy and music and the time Will spent on the force. The warmth in Hannibal's eyes when he looked at Will, looked at him like Will was everything he could ever need. The way Hannibal would purr and touch Will's hair when Will had nightmares, and he'd find Will roaming the halls of his home, desperate to make sure everything was locked and secure and that his pack was safe.

That single kiss, Hannibal warm and solid and powerful in his arms, the way he'd held Will by the neck, so gently, eased him into pliancy with quiet noises only Will could hear. The scent of budding slick. The taste of wine on Hannibal's tongue.

Hannibal nods, and simply says, "Yes." Then, "In a way, all of it was."

Will swallows, and shakes his head, but he understands – if, at any point, Will hadn't lived up to Hannibal's expectations, pieces of him might be in the pot on the stove, instead of whatever it is now. He wouldn't be standing here if Hannibal's regard for him was fake.

Doctor Lecter's office is on the ground floor of a large, white building, that stands alone on the side of the road. Will parks the car and enters at the front, follows a little hallway until he reaches the office door, with his name sitting on a gold label on the side. He checks his watch – a little early.

He knocks.

After a moment, the door opens, revealing a man a little taller than Will, imposing and sharply-dressed. Will blinks, lifting his eyes, and meets the man's – they're dark, thin threads of gold marking him as Omega. His face is impassive, he's older than Will imagined he'd be with a teenager daughter – Omegas tend to mate young – but Will sees, in his broad chest and sharp eyes, that he is strong. Not someone to be trifled with.

Will ducks his head. "Doctor Lecter?" he murmurs, and holds out his hand to shake. "Will Graham. Nice to meet you."

Doctor Lecter smiles, closed-lipped, and shakes Will's hand. "Will. A pleasure. Please, come in." Will nods, rubbing his hand over the back of his neck as he enters the office. It smells clean, faintly like the Omega since he must spend so much time in here. It's an open, large room, with a walkway creating a semi-second floor, the walls lined with books. Comfortable, thick-armed chairs sit facing each other on a colorful carpet, a loveseat forming the point of a diamond, and a large desk the last piece. It gives the impression, at the same time, of being corralled and yet kept safe.

Will's shoulders roll. "Would you like to hang your coat?"

He turns, flushing, and gives a nod of thanks, shrugging off his coat and handing it over. Doctor Lecter takes it with a smile, brushing it down almost absently, and hangs it. He pauses. "You have animals?"

"Dogs," Will replies with a nod. For lack of any additional direction, he goes to one of the chairs, and sits. It's a comfortable chair, and he sinks back into it with a sigh. After a moment, Doctor Lecter joins him, sitting in the opposite one. Despite Will's ingrained dislike of therapy, hospitals, or anything to do, he feels relaxed.

Doctor Lecter regards him coolly, head tilted. His silence begs to be filled, and Will rubs a hand over his mouth again. That earns a small lift from Doctor Lecter's chin, his nostrils flaring as he breathes in, scenting Will.

"You're Alpha," he says. He doesn't sound surprised.

Will nods.

"The role of caretaker and keeping the home does not typically attract Alphas," Doctor Lecter says, like another observation. Will swallows, and nods again. "May I ask, what drew you to contact me for this position?"

Will expected this question, but the reminder makes him wince. "I took care of my mother, for a long time," he replies. Doctor Lecter's head tilts a little further.

"Are you still?"

Will shakes his head. "He died," he says, and sees Doctor Lecter's fingers flex, filing away Will's mother's designation as Omega, not female. He hums; a gently encouraging sound. "It was a while back, a few weeks. But I…have experience with looking after people, I guess is what I'm saying."

Doctor Lecter's eyes shine, and his lips tilt up in a little smile.

"How long did you care for your mother?" he asks.

Will rubs his neck, lifts his eyes, trying to remember. "Um. Years?" he hazards. "He had cancer. Took a while to, you know…" He stops, gesturing vaguely.

Doctor Lecter makes another sound, this one accepting and gently sympathetic. "I'm sorry for your loss, Will," he says kindly, and Will nods, looking away. He sees, in his periphery, another headtilt. "Not a fan of eye contact, are you?"

Will winces again. "Sorry," he says, and hides the truth behind; "I know Omegas tend to have trouble holding it. I don't like forcing it if I can help it."

Another pleased sound meets this statement. "I assure you, Will, I have no trouble maintaining eye contact," comes the reply, and Will swallows, and forces himself to let their gazes lock again. If Doctor Lecter notices his own discomfort, he doesn't voice it – merely smiles, and says. "Well, as it said in my notice, I require someone with open availability and their own vehicle."

Will nods. "Yeah, and background checks, drug tests. I'm good for all of that."

"Excellent," Doctor Lecter says with a smile. "I should also tell you – though I refer to her as my daughter, and she thinks of me as her mother, Abigail is not biologically mine."

Will blinks, frowning.

"I crossed paths with her father a long time ago, when she was still very young. He had gone feral after the death of his wife, and I was his therapist for a time." There's a small pause, a shred of something dark passing behind Doctor Lecter's eyes. "He brought her, during one session, and tried to force a bond with me. I killed him, and took her for my own."

Will's frown deepens. It isn't illegal, especially when combined with Doctor Lecter's obvious wealth and status – any Alpha that is feral and tries to force a bond may be slaughtered by the Omega, if the Omega is able to do it. Nor, Will thinks, would it be difficult for him to assume a bond with the child, and if she had no biological parents left, evidence of the Alpha's attempt to harm and mate with him, and if they were close at all – well, no one would bat an eye.

Doctor Lecter's chin lifts, in Will's silence. "I'd like to know your opinion on that."

Will breathes out, and gives a helpless shrug, a small shake of his head. "I guess it's not really any of my business," he says after a moment. He sees, in Doctor Lecter's eyes, a spark of pleasure. "I mean, she's yours now." A hum. "You take care of her, treat her as your own." He swallows. "You love her?"

"Dearly," Doctor Lecter replies.

"Then that's it," Will says with another shrug. His head tilts, and he presses his lips together, dragging his thumb over the side of his mouth. "Honestly I'm more surprised that you felt the need to tell me. I don't even know if I have the job."

Doctor Lecter smiles, widely, showing a line of imperfect, sharp-looking teeth. The sight of them makes Will shiver, but he doesn't show his own in return – a lack of action that, he senses, pleases the other man greatly. Will is not a boorish Alpha, not even close, nor has he ever run the risk of becoming feral.

"You're more intrigued by my sharing of the crime, than the crime itself," he says quietly.

"It's not a crime to put down a rabid dog," Will replies before he can stop himself. "Any Alpha that would try to…" He can't say the words, settles instead for another hard noise and a shake of his head.

But Doctor Lecter lifts his chin, and purrs; "You certainly have a protective streak." Will flushes, swallowing, and can merely nod. "That's good. As I said, I love Abigail dearly, and would not trust her safety to just anyone." Will nods again – he wouldn't expect anything less. "Are you available tonight? As well as I'm sure we'd get along together, I will need her opinion of you as well. Perhaps, if you're willing, you will join us for dinner."

Will rubs over his neck, feeling a strange warmth in his throat at the sight of Doctor Lecter's smile. "Yeah, I can make it," he says.

"Excellent. Thank you, Will," comes the reply, and then he stands. Will follows suit, letting Doctor Lecter herd him towards the door. He takes Will's coat and hands it to him. "I'll text you my address. Please come by at seven. If all goes well, we'll discuss the finer details of your employment."

"Thank you, Doctor Lecter," Will murmurs, shrugging on his coat.

"Oh, and please," Doctor Lecter purrs, reaching out and smoothing a hand over Will's arm. His touch is warm, and this close to him, Will gets a good lungful of his scent; paper, ink, wine. The sharp afterburn of whiskey. "Call me Hannibal."

Hannibal calls Abigail back in, and they eat together around Will's tiny table, so small and cold when compared to the rich warmth of Hannibal's home. Will's stomach is tight with

hunger, but he eats slowly, and does his best to avoid the meat. He won't ask what it is, or who it is. He doesn't want to know the answer.

Hannibal is sitting across from him, the picture of ease, Abigail in the middle, her eyes darting between them like she's watching a tennis game. She is pale in the fading sunlight, her dark hair and bright eyes making her look like a ghost.

When the meal is done, Hannibal sighs, and lifts his eyes to meet Will's. Finally. Will swallows, his throat suddenly too tight to handle his last mouthful, and he reaches with a shaking hand to wrap around his glass of water, chugging it down.

Then Hannibal starts to purr.

Will sets his glass down harder than he meant to, bares his teeth and snarls, "Don't fucking do that."

Abigail jumps. She can't hear Alpha and Omega sounds, as a woman, so Will's outburst startles her. Will fights back the urge to reach for her, to soothe her and tuck her under his arm and his chin and let her feel the rumble of his own purr in his chest.

Hannibal's brows lift, and he smiles. But he stops purring.

Will groans, his elbows on the table, his head in his hands. "This is such a fucking mess," he whines. Even now, even still, he aches for Hannibal, wants to reach for them both and bring them to his nest and lock down the house, keep watch while they sleep. However it happened, whatever Hannibal and Abigail did to make it happen, Will's hindbrain knows the scents and touch of his mate and his daughter. Will has never mated, never even pair-bonded with someone before, but this ache feels like having one forcibly separated.

He wonders if Hannibal can feel it too. Hopes he does. Hopes it hurts.

"How many?" he demands.

"Dad -."

Will snaps his teeth together, his hand curling around Abigail's wrist when she reaches for him. He gentles his touch immediately – he can't hurt her, won't hurt her. Her eyes are wide, and Will breathes out, forces himself to loosen his fingers and place her hand under his on the table.

"How many?" he asks again.

Hannibal's lips purse, and he sighs through his nose. "Countless," he replies, and Will flinches, rubbing his thumb along the back of Abigail's knuckles.

"You took it this far with all of them?"

Hannibal's eyes flash, almost insulted, and he shakes his head. "No," he says coolly.

Will's free hand flexes, drags down the side of his neck. "Don't lie to me."

"We're not!" Abigail says, and her eyes are bright with tears, and Will swallows. *Soothe her, soothe her, take care of her*. "I never liked any of them, and some of them did…tried to do bad things." Her eyes flash to Hannibal, then land back on Will. "But you were so nice to me, and so, just, *good*. You treated me and mama with so much respect, I could tell how much you wanted to provide for us and take care of us."

She squeezes his fingers.

"You're a *good person*, dad," she whispers, and Will flinches, gritting his teeth. "I've never been so happy as I've been since mama found you."

And Will knows that. Remembers, absently, the lingering scent of resignation and dullness that had been in Hannibal's home when first he entered. How it brightened, how each room became more intimate and lit up as he spent time there. Remembers the one night there was a storm and they'd all curled up together in front of the fire while the power went out, Abigail's face tucked to his shoulder and Hannibal a warm, solid weight on his other side. He doesn't doubt Abigail likes him. If she didn't like him, he'd be dead.

He squeezes her hand, breathing in deeply.

"I'm not going to the police," he says, because he feels like that's the question Hannibal isn't asking. He lifts his eyes. "I won't tell anyone what you've done." Hannibal's lips press together, and he nods. But of course, he knows that – Will has been so thoroughly shrouded by them, buried too deep in love and joy and Alpha protectiveness, he will never dig his way out.

Not unless he closes himself off from them completely.

He lets go of Abigail's hand, and stands. "You're going to have to find yourself another caretaker," he says harshly, gathering their plates and bringing them to the kitchen. "I'm done. I don't want to see or hear from either of you ever again."

Abigail's quiet, heartbroken sound is covered by Hannibal's chair creaking back. Will's shoulders tense, knowing Hannibal is behind him. He fills the sink with hot water and sets the dishes inside, resolute in his decision not to meet his eyes.

"Will," Hannibal says. "Don't be foolish. You belong with us."

Will shakes his head, grits his teeth. Growls, "No." And *God*, it aches. He stares, stares down into the sink, watches the water rise up. He didn't put any dish soap in it, but the sticky remnants of the rice is clouding the water.

Go to them, protect your pack, can't you hear your daughter crying?

Will's head hurts. He doesn't know if Hannibal intends to reach for him. Doesn't know what he'll do, if he does.

Then, a sigh. "Breaking our bond will hurt us both," he says, and Will closes his eyes. So, he is hurting too. Good. And Will brutally stamps down the surge of elation he feels, hearing

Hannibal call it theirs. His fingers curl around the side of the sink, until the steaming water brushes his thumbs.

He turns it off. "It's not the worst pain I've ever felt," he replies, and grabs a sponge, dipping both hands in the water as if to prove it. His mother's death, his stab wound, the way the water is burning into his hands – yes, those are all hurts. Terrible aches. They have nothing on this pain. He huffs a bitter laugh. "Maybe this'll be good for you."

Hannibal makes a soft noise – not quite a whine. Will's hands go still.

"Leave," he hisses, and glares down at the water. "Take her and fucking go."

He hears Hannibal sigh. Closes his eyes and turns his face away as Hannibal's shadow darkens the window, a reflection of pallid fever and then him, black, monstrous. He feels the brush of warmth – not contact, just a hint of it, his sensitivities fine-tuned to his mate – and then Hannibal moves away. At the side of the sink is Will's cell phone, that he had dropped when he saw the truth of what they were, and left at the house.

"Let me know if you change your mind," Hannibal murmurs. "One way or the other."

Then he leaves. Abigail's chair squeaks. The front door opens, and shuts, and he hears his dogs give a curious set of woofs and whines. Will growls, clenches his eyes tightly shut, and presses his hands to the bottom of his sink so the water turns his forearms pink and tender, until it hurts, and his fingertips burn on the metal basin.

"*Fuck*."

Chapter 2

Doctor Lecter's – *Hannibal's*, he wanted Will to call him Hannibal – home is a solitary brownstone, in the part of Baltimore that becomes suburban Annapolis. It is a large, imposing-looking building, and reminds Will of gothic mansions and ghost stories. Still, it looks welcoming enough, with its well-manicured garden, low stone wall separating sidewalk and property, and bright-lit windows.

He goes to the front door and knocks, checking his watch again. Traffic hadn't been kind to him, but Will had managed to get home, feed and let out his dogs, before changing and heading back. He wants to make a good impression, knowing that an Omega's home is their castle, and Abigail's opinion of him will seal the deal for this job if it turns out they all get on well.

It's just shy of seven, not quite enough to be notably early. A shadow moves and Will sees a little curtain shift so whoever's behind the door can peek outside, and then the door opens, revealing a girl no older than seventeen. She has straight black hair that falls past her shoulders, and bright blue eyes that remind Will of Alana.

She's pretty, in that 'Mall of America' kind of way, wearing no makeup as Will has seen other girls her age do, revealing a smattering of freckles across her nose and cheeks. If Hannibal didn't already tell him they weren't related, Will would note that she doesn't look anything like her mother.

She blinks at him, and he gives her an awkward smile. "Hi," he says. "I'm Will Graham. Your mother's expecting me."

Her expression doesn't change, but her head tilts, and she looks him up and down, and Will is sharply reminded of the way he used to look at Alphas and women his father would date, when he got old enough to understand that kind of thing.

Then, she smiles brightly at him, and steps aside to let him pass. "Nice to meet you, Will," she says, and Will nods, ducking his head as he enters the home. It smells clean, inside, vaguely of lemon-scented cleaner, polish, dark wood, rich carpeting. Among it, Hannibal's scent, and hers, which is like freshly-mown grass and river mud; something vaguely sweet, promising spring. He smiles, shrugging off his coat, for the house is warm.

She takes it, hangs it, and tucks it into a closet behind Will. "This way, please," she says, and gestures for Will to follow. A narrow hallway gives way to a large dining room, with a dark table gleaming in the lights. Will lifts his chin, unable to stop himself scenting the place, for this room smells warmer, well-used, and soaked with the undeniable fragrance of meat and fat.

Hannibal emerges from a second doorway, wiping his hands on a dishtowel. "Oh, Will, excellent." His smile is warm, welcoming, and Will smiles back, petting over the side of his neck and keeping his eyes low. "Please, have a seat wherever you'd like. Would you care for a drink?"

"Water, please," Will replies. Hannibal nods, and disappears again, into a room that, judging by the laminate and the glimpse of teal cabinets, is the kitchen. From the room, scents of food waft in, making Will's mouth water. It smells excellent.

He eyes the table. Every place is set, leaving it completely open to Will to decide where he'll take his place. Abigail remains by the door, her arms folded and shoulder braced on the frame. She's looking at Will like he's a newly-broken horse, waiting to see if he will buck or tremble at the presence of the saddle. He meets her eyes, and her brows lift expectantly.

If this were his own home, as an Alpha, Will's place would be at the head of the table. He discards that notion immediately – this isn't his house, and to presume to sit there even with his breed designation would be terribly rude. He tilts his head. "Where do you normally sit?"

Her lips thin out, her chin lefts. "On the right," she says.

Will nods, circles the table, and takes his place on the left-hand side of the head. He resists the urge to touch the backs of the chairs as he goes, does not mark the mantle above the fireplace, doesn't drag his knuckles along the wall. She smiles.

Hannibal returns with a glass of ice water, which he sets on a cloth coaster. Will gives him a thankful smile which Hannibal returns, and leaves again. Abigail prowls to her normal seat, pulling out her chair and plopping into it.

"So," she says, and folds her hands together, resting her forearms on the edge. "You're the new guy."

Will smiles, and takes a drink. "Not yet," he replies. Her eyes flash with another spark of pleased light. They might not be related, but Abigail acts like her mother all the same. He wonders, idly, how young she was when Hannibal adopted her. If she's as chameleon-like as Will is. "I have to win you over first."

She grins at him, toothy and bright. "And mama."

Will nods. "Yes, him too."

She tilts her head, her hair falling down one side of her neck. It bares a thin, pale scar on the revealed side, very long, from the center to so far back Will doesn't see the other end. It looks like the kind of thing that should have killed her. Will frowns, swallowing back the flare of protective instinct he feels. She's alright, now, obviously. Maybe it happened when her father attacked Hannibal.

Her brow creases in a fine line. "You're an Alpha, aren't you?" she asks. Will nods – all Alphas have a thin ring of red in their eyes to show what they are, as Omegas have gold, though Will's has never been particularly thick. She huffs. "Why would an Alpha want to be a glorified babysitter?"

Will laughs. If she's seeking to poke at his pride, she will have to try harder. "Lots of reasons," he replies lightly.

She waits, blinking, for him to say more, and straightens when he doesn't. Hannibal emerges from the kitchen, three plates balanced in his hands. He serves Abigail, first – females go first, then Omegas, then Alphas. But Alpha eats first. The plate is richly colored with a thick red-pink sauce. Beneath it, thin cuts of what Will guesses is pork, with a side of green beans.

Will smiles as his plate is set, and Hannibal sits at the head of the table, taking his cloth napkin and placing it over his thighs. "This looks amazing," Will breathes, and it's not an exaggeration. The scent of the meat and the sweet sauce reaches his nose and he sucks in a breath through parted teeth, letting it soak into the palette at the roof of his mouth, into his lungs.

Hannibal smiles at him. "Thank you, Will," he purrs. Neither he nor Abigail reach for their forks. Alpha eats first.

Will wants to tell them they don't have to wait, but he senses this is another test. He takes his knife and fork and slices himself a piece, gathers a healthy dollop of the sauce on the meat, and takes a bite while they watch. He breathes out again, smiling at the rich flavor – a little tart, mostly sweet, absolutely delicious.

A purr rises, unbidden, instinctively wanting to reward the Omega for providing such a fine meal. He clears his throat, flushing when Hannibal smiles, and his dark eyes flash with mirth. Abigail sits up a little straighter, pulling her hands back, and starts to eat as well. Hannibal last, once she's taken a bite, and for a moment there is only the clink of silverware to plates, soft breaths and little sounds of enjoyment.

Then, Abigail sets her silverware down. "I need some water," she says, and stands. "Mama, do you want a drink?"

"Thank you, my dear. There's an open bottle of wine in the fridge."

She nods, smiling, and goes into the kitchen. For another moment, there is merely silence, and then Will smiles and clears his throat. "She behaves a lot like you."

Hannibal's brows lift at that. "How so?"

Will shrugs one shoulder, taking another bite of food before answering. "She likes to test people," he says. "Monitor behavior."

Hannibal huffs a laugh. "Forgive me, but you must have very sharp eyes to assume that." He doesn't deny it, and Will grins, unrepentant. "You're not wrong. Abigail inherited a keen desire to understand human behavior, from whichever parent gave it to her."

"You're her mother," Will replies. "She learned it from you."

Hannibal pauses, his eyes on Will, and they shine with pride.

Abigail returns, with a glass of water for herself and a glass of white wine, which she sets at the corner of Hannibal's place setting. She has braided her hair, over the side of the neck

where her scar is, and Will wonders if she noticed him staring. She brushes her hand against Hannibal's before taking her seat, and Hannibal smiles at her.

She grins back, and goes back to eating. Hannibal shifts his weight. "So, Will, what did you do for a living before caring for your mother?"

Will takes a drink of water. "I was a cop," he replies. Abigail's eyes lift, and widen. She pauses mid-chew. "Homicide. In Louisiana, then we moved up here for a drug trial he was in."

"Ah," Hannibal says, like this has solved some mystery for him. "I thought I heard some difference in your accent." Will flushes, ducking his head, and continues to eat. "Do you miss it?"

"Louisiana, or being a cop?"

"Both, I suppose." Hannibal's smile has teeth.

Will hums. The green beans are turgid and warm, strangely sweet for Hannibal's breed's tastes, and with a satisfying crunch that soothes Will's teeth. He wonders if Hannibal planned this meal in mind, or it was an afterthought – it's no secret Alphas crave meat, and like to chew on things when their urge to bite grows too fierce.

"It was nice," he says. "I miss the heat. The people. And the work was…satisfying, I suppose. When I got to put people away, but after a while it started to wear on me."

"Was the hunt not diverting enough?" Hannibal purrs. "The satisfaction of catching your killers?"

Will lifts a brow, meets Hannibal's eyes. They are still shining, a lightless place in his iris that reflects nothing back staring Will down. No trouble maintaining eye contact, not in the slightest. Will swallows. "Well, like I said, we moved up here for the treatment. I would have done it forever if that hadn't been the case."

Abigail sighs. "There's no shortage of psychopaths in the world," she says softly.

"They weren't all crazy," Will replies, his eyes ducking to Hannibal's hands as he cleanly slices off another bite of the pork. Even as he speaks, Hannibal's hands still. "Some people have a very good reason for killing."

He doesn't manage how Abigail's eyes flash to her mother, and her lips twitch in a thin smile. But it's warm, and Will swallows down another sip of water. He knows, absently, that this probably isn't the kind of thing people should be talking about as a potential employer and employee, but the food is good, the lights comfortably low, and Will is calmed by the combined scents of Hannibal and Abigail, and their presence. It feels good to be around people again.

"Forgive me for asking," Hannibal says coolly, after another moment, "but why did you not return, after your mother passed? If you miss it so much."

Will presses his lips together, and frowns down at his plate. In truth, the idea of moving back to his childhood town hadn't even occurred to him – and there are so many reasons to remain here. This is where his mother died. This is where Will's house is, where he's lived for years. Alana is here. Have you *tried* getting seven dogs in a car for that long?

But he clears his throat, and simply says, "Home is here, now."

Hannibal smiles at him, that same kind thing he'd given Will in his office, and accepts that with a nod. "I have often entertained thoughts of going back to Paris, where I attended college." Will tilts his head; he knows Hannibal's accent is European, but he would have assumed it had more Eastern influence. "Perhaps when I retire. Or Italy. I'm teaching Abigail Italian."

"You speak it?"

"I speak five languages in total, with varying degrees of fluency," Hannibal replies with a small nod.

"I know some French," Will says, and gestures vaguely after setting his knife down, reaching for his water glass. He takes a drink, and his eyes meet Abigail's. She is still watching him like a stray cat might eye a newcomer in her alley.

"Is that so?" Hannibal asks lightly, like he already knew this. "Perhaps we shall practice with that, as well."

Will blinks, and breaks Abigail's gaze. Such a statement suggests Will might get the job. He swallows so that he doesn't make an eager sound.

"So, Abigail," he says, and she straightens. "Are you a junior? Senior?"

"Going into senior year," she replies with a nod.

"It's one of the reasons I am in need of someone to take her place to place," Hannibal adds.

Abigail nods again, and smiles widely. "Gotta pack as many extracurriculars onto my college applications as I can," she jokes.

Will laughs. "What are you doing now?" he asks. She seems like the kind of girl who enjoys things like theatre club and the debate team – even from what little he knows of her, and her mother, he would think it a waste not to put her shrewd observation and analytical skills to good use.

"I volunteer as sound tech for the drama department, and help them make sets. And I'm thinking of running for student class president, so that'll have, you know, debates and whatever. I play lacrosse, too."

Will blinks. "What position?"

"Center."

Of course. Right in the thick of it. He smiles. "Well, if you ever need a place to practice, my house is in the middle of a field. I can mark out a pitch for you and you can try and outrun my dogs."

Abigail's eyes brighten, and she grins, sitting up straighter. "You have dogs?"

"Seven."

Her eyes widen, and she looks at Hannibal with barely-disguised glee. "*Seven* dogs." She's practically vibrating with excitement.

Hannibal's brows rise. "That is quite a large number," he says idly. "Did you keep a litter of puppies?"

Will shakes his head. "I adopt strays," he replies. "But they're all very well-trained." Hannibal nods, lips pursed as if in thought, and Will adds, "I don't mean to presume. I was just offering."

Hannibal's eyes flash, and he tilts his head. "Do you think you spoke out of turn?" He sounds curious more than anything else.

Will flushes, biting his lower lip. He looks down. Says, quietly, "I get the feeling you…have a somewhat negative feeling towards the idea of your daughter playing around outside with a bunch of animals."

Hannibal laughs, sharply and short, like the reaction was involuntary and he's surprised at himself for doing so. "Very sharp eyes," he murmurs, pleased and proud, and Will flushes deeper, trying to hide his reaction by taking another bite of food. "I find it novel, is all – previous applicants have not gone out of their way to make such an offer."

Will hums, and tilts his head, rubbing over the back of his neck. "Well, I mean -."

"Will, please don't misunderstand me. Your eagerness to socialize and provide additional support is refreshingly pleasant." He smiles, first at Abigail, then at Will. "There's no reason we can't all be friendly with each other."

Will smiles, a fissure of warmth blossoming in his chest. "Yeah," he says quietly, looking down at his hands. "I'd like that."

Will doesn't sleep. He paces, frantic and aching, without form or direction. This is torture – to the bone, to the soul. His teeth feel too sharp in his mouth, his throat hurts like he's been screaming for hours, and every part of him is vibrating with the need to run to his mate, to his daughter, to take them in his arms and keep them safe from everything that might do them harm.

But they don't need that – they're both predators, carnivores. They're the most dangerous people he's ever met.

Oh, *God*, it hurts. It hurts to think about them, but he can do little else. Nothing provides distraction – not his animals, not his whiskey. He drinks until he has nothing left to drink, stumbles to the bathroom and empties his stomach and groans at the chunky half-digested mess of food that comes up. His mother once told him that a bond feels like a hook in your chest, pulling you ungraciously and relentlessly to your mate. Hands only soothed by their skin, neck aching for their teeth, entire body and soul and mind soaked with their influence until it's fracturing to be apart from them.

This feels like that. Will's bones, too brittle to maintain his weight, his heartbeat weak and thrumming in his ears like the wings of a hummingbird. He throws his phone into the vomit-soaked toilet and flushes, and flushes again, until it's all washed away. If he doesn't have it, he can't call them.

Hannibal's stipend was generous – after six months Will simply started living with them, and tending to his dogs began to replace tending to Abigail, so that Will spent more time in Annapolis than he did in Wolf Trap. He had enough to handle the mortgage, and the rest he saved, and he has enough now to be able to get the fuck out of dodge if he wants to.

He could go back, to Louisiana, buy a little house in the middle of the swamplands and shut himself away from the world. He will be one of those older, lonely Alphas that children talk about, with too many dogs and not enough social graces. A witch in the woods, a Rougarou that parents tell their kids about at night to encourage them to travel in packs and lock their windows.

He moans, shudders, and heaves again, whimpering weakly, clutching the toilet lid above his head hard enough that the plastic creaks. His dogs are whining, concerned for their master, outside the bathroom door. Abigail was sick with the flu, one week, and Will remembers being half-mad with the need to take care of her. He pressed warm towels to her forehead, fed her soup, slept at the foot of her bed as she shivered and whimpered until her fever broke. He was so relieved when it did, he hugged her tightly and helped her to the shower, fed her until she was fit to burst, pet her damp hair and read her Shakespeare until she fell asleep again, nose tucked to his hip.

He's no better than a Goddamn dog.

After his mother's death, Will doesn't manage to clear out his stuff for a week. He sits, on the mattress in the living room, eyes the gun safe, the big leather chair, the host of blankets atop it. Winston is sitting in it, right now, his ears low and his tail drooping. He had the upstairs bedroom, and Will can't even go near it – it still smells like him, despite the fact that it's been almost a month since he was in it.

He sits, and stares, one hand buried in Addy's scruff. She has her head on his thigh, dark eyes wide and sad and looking up at him. He sighs, and flops onto his back, to be immediately joined by Harley and Buster as they flank him and settle, Buster's nose tucked under his arm.

He doesn't cry – he might be dry at this point, or perhaps he knows his mother wouldn't want him to weep. Will doesn't believe much in the afterlife, not like he did, nor does he believe that one gets the choice to linger after the fact and watch the goings on in the world, but he thinks, idly and with a sad smile, of his mother's penchant for keeping up with the news, and thinks he would appreciate Will doing the same.

Alana shows up on the eighth day, with a trailer in tow and a rented U-Haul. She enters Will's house, the front door unlocked, and the dogs flutter and stir, but they know her presence and give her little more trouble than a few soft woofs and wandering noses.

She comes to him with a sigh, lays down in the space Buster vacated, and puts her head on his chest. His free hand slides to her hair, curls like in Addy's scruff, and he sighs, and it's shaky. "Hey," he rasps, voice hoarse from disuse.

She doesn't say anything, merely hums and pets over his chest.

Then, "How's Margot?"

"We don't have to talk about Margot."

"I'd like to talk about anything other than what you're here to talk about."

She sighs. "I'm here to help you clean up," she says. "But we don't have to do that right now."

"This is the depression stage, right? Denial, Anger, Bargaining…" Will frowns. "I hit anger pretty quickly. I don't think I touched the bargaining stage."

"There's still time," she says, the humor in her voice strained.

Will laughs. "Now who's bargaining?"

She sighs again, and Will wonders if this is the way people deal with death – sitting and staring and sighing. When he was a cop, he always witnessed the tears. The bargaining. The anger. Shock, first. No one ever thinks they'll lose a loved one like that.

He rolls to his side, gathers her hair at her neck and presses his nose to the top of her head as she hugs him. Breathes in; vanilla and jasmine, as always. His dogs provide some comfort, some mimic of human warmth, but there's something nice about embracing someone who can embrace back when emotions are high.

"I wish I'd gotten to know him better," she murmurs into his chest. Her hands pet, gently, up his back, and Will trembles finely, throat tight as he tries to keep his emotions in check. "He seemed sweet."

"He was," Will breathes. Best damn man Will ever knew. He takes another deep inhale of her scent – realizes, with a sharp pang of sadness, that she smells sweet enough to be Omega. His

hands tighten, then he makes them loosen, one sliding down to her shoulder and pulling her close.

She nods, and her eyes are wet, Will can smell her tears. She pulls back and cups his face with utmost gentleness, and makes a quiet sound – sweet, soft, something that kicks at his hindbrain and spurs him into action.

"Come on," she says, and sits up, pulling him to his feet. "Once it's done, you'll feel better. I promise."

Will doesn't believe her, but he bows his head and follows, obedient to a fault.

The storm is wild, rattling the windows, shaking the roof, and Will prowls through the dark hallways, halfway between fight and flight. The entire house is dark – the power is out, and the clock in the kitchen blinks midnight at him, lime green glowing numbers that he only half-sees.

He hears movement, whirls around with a snarl, lunges for the intruder that would dare to invade his home and threaten his family.

He has teeth at the other man's neck before he hears it – a sweet, quiet purr, a low whine. He gentles his hands immediately, gasps, lashes going low. Hannibal, it's only Hannibal.

He whines, trembles when he feels a hand combing through his unruly hair.

"It's not safe," he growls. "Get back in bed."

Hannibal huffs a laugh, and tightens his hand, tugging on Will's hair. Lightning cracks outside, painting the room for a moment in a bright, overbearing flash of white and silver. Hannibal's face, sharp with shadows, his eyes ringed brightly with gold. Will touches him, cups his flanks and bares his teeth. It's dangerous – Hannibal shouldn't be alone, out and about, unguarded.

Another streak of lightning, a rumble of thunder, and Will flinches, snarling loudly, for the wind is making the house creak and groan and this is the perfect time for someone to attack, when Will's senses are enflamed and he can't tell what is the natural noise a house might make, and what might be a footstep, an opening door.

"Will."

Will's eyes snap to Hannibal's, and he snarls again, only to go instantly quiet when Hannibal cups his face. The Omega's hands are large, warm, strong as he touches Will, smooths a palm over his forehead and pushes his hair from his eyes.

"It's not safe," he says again.

Hannibal's voice holds a smile. "Then come protect me," he purrs. Will nods, lets Hannibal guide him out of the kitchen, through the dining room, down the hallway and up the stairs. Hannibal's bedroom is to the left, Abigail's on the right, the second door down.

Will puts Hannibal in his room, snarls as another flash of lightning brightens the space. "I have to go get her," he says.

"Will. She's asleep, and perfectly safe."

Will shakes his head. Snaps his teeth together and lets out another rumble that's lost in the thunder. "No," he murmurs. Hannibal doesn't let him go, touches and pets his hair, trying to calm him. It almost works, but Will's instincts are alight with the need to watch them, to care for them. He shakes the touch away and leaves, prowling to Abigail's room.

He knocks, and then opens the door, sees her sitting bolt upright and staring at her window, clutching a thick blanket to her neck. She turns, a darker shade of black in the shadows, and Will lets out a purr, aching to soothe her. He goes to her, pleased when she falls into his arms, lax and trusting.

"Come with me," he whispers, kissing her hair. She nods, far less protesting than her mother, and he gathers her close with her blanket wrapped around her and leads her back to Hannibal's room. Hannibal isn't in bed, but standing at the foot of it, and though Will can't see his face in the darkness he knows the weight of it on his neck.

"Come, both of you," he coaxes. He has no Alpha Voice to compel them to obey, but Abigail submits regardless with a soft, scared noise, as Will presses her to Hannibal's chest and wraps them both in her blanket. They go to bed and Will tucks them in, soothed despite himself once he has them safe, in the same place – easily defensible.

He leans down, nuzzles Abigail's dark hair, squeezes Hannibal's shoulder. He can't see their faces, but just knowing they're safe, and together, makes the frantic howling in his head calm somewhat. He straightens when there's another flash of lightning, snarls at the window, though it's hidden behind Hannibal's drawn curtains.

"Will," Hannibal says, his voice somewhere between amused and exasperated. "This isn't necessary."

Will doesn't believe him. This is the kind of storm that promises danger. He squeezes Hannibal's shoulder again, aching to soothe, to relieve the tension there. Hannibal is just trying to calm him. Maybe he's afraid – he shouldn't be afraid of Will, *God*, please don't be afraid of him. Abigail shifts her weight, rolls onto her side so her back is to her mother's chest. She reaches for Will, wrapping her dainty hand around his wrist.

Will smiles, and raises her hand to his mouth, kissing her knuckles. "I'll be right outside," he promises her. His eyes itch with red and his teeth feel too sharp, *daring* someone to come into his house and threaten his family.

He leans down again, cups her face and nuzzles her temple. "Nothing's gonna hurt you," he whispers. She nods, swallowing, and he pulls back. "Get some sleep. Stay here. Stay where

it's safe."

He leaves before he can hear another protest, and goes to his room. Inside is the single weapon he'd kept from his father's and his stash – his old pistol, he hasn't used it since he was a cop, but the weight of it falls into his hand easily, like an extension of himself. He loads it, grunting with frustration when it takes a moment for him to find his bullets, but he can load it from memory, blind, by feel alone. He pulls the slide back to ready the first round.

He goes back to Hannibal's room, and sits in the hallway, his back to the closed door. Waits, quivering, for one of the shadows to make a wrong move.

The storm lasts throughout the night, until the grey light of dawn comes, and Will is just as awake as he had been the entire time. He only moves once he hears them stirring inside, and goes and unloads and hides his gun again, so that he doesn't scare them.

Abigail goes to her room after dinner, citing the need to do some homework, and Hannibal clears the plates, inviting Will to join him in the study after he fills the sink and leaves the dishes to soak.

"Can I offer you a nightcap?" he asks.

Will swallows, and shakes his head. "I'm alright, thank you," he replies. "I want to be able to drive back."

Hannibal regards him with a raised brow. "Surely one glass won't kill you," he says with a smile.

"I'm trying to make a good impression here," Will replies, unable to stop a teasing grin coming to his face. It makes Hannibal laugh, which he likes – Hannibal's laugh is quiet, more of a huff of breath than anything else.

"Very well," he murmurs, and wipes his hands. "I hope you won't mind that I indulge."

Will shakes his head, and watches as Hannibal goes to a small cabinet between the wall and the window, behind a gleaming, dark grand piano, and opens a black bottle, pouring himself a small glass of something that smells very sweet. Most Omegas have a large sweet tooth, and Will's mouth goes dry as he watches Hannibal pour, sets the bottle down, and takes a sip.

"Well," he says after a moment, and takes a seat on the couch opposite Will. Again, lacking direction, Will put his back to the door since he senses Hannibal prefers to see it. "I think that went very well."

Will nods, flushing lightly. "I think so, too."

"Abigail's schedule is light right now, but as school starts again I will require someone to drive her to school, and then retrieve her, as well as chauffer her to and from her

extracurriculars, some of which are outside the city, and may require a weekend commitment."

Will nods.

"Once she has decided on colleges she'd like to view, there may be times when she will need to be taken for tours, and conferences. Away matches, things like that." Will nods again and Hannibal takes another sip of his drink. "Providing your background check and drug test are passed, are you still interested in the position?"

"Yeah," Will says, shifting his weight. He rubs over the back of his neck, smiling. "She seems like a good kid. I like her."

Hannibal grins, widely. "I'm quite fond of her myself," he says, voice low and teasing, and Will huffs a laugh. "Excellent. I'll refer you to a clinic where you can get tested and send you the paperwork to initiate the background check." He pauses, and gives Will a smile that seems almost affectionate. "I'm looking forward to working with you, Will."

"Yeah, same here. Thank you so much, Hannibal, I won't let you down."

He finds the picture when Alana is helping him clean out the upstairs bedroom. It's tucked under the mattress, creased deeply in a set of four, like it was folded and refolded several times, and the paper is so thin and brittle Will thinks he might accidentally tear it apart just by touching it.

He doesn't recognize the man, but he has curly blond hair. A wide smile that shows his fangs, and green eyes ringed with red. Will's fingers shake.

Alana's heels click in the hallway and Will looks up, and finds it hard to focus on the outline of her. Her eyes dart down to the picture in his hands, and Will follows suit, taking in the sight of this man – he can't have been older than twenty-five at the time the picture was taken.

"What's that?" she asks, too-lightly.

Will shivers, and collapses onto the barren mattress with a sob. Runs a hand over his mouth and tightens his knuckles around the paper until it gives, sagging like it's wet, crushed under his knuckles. "My father," he murmurs. He shakes his head. "My mom never talked about him. Not once."

But he kept his picture. Hid it away like a dirty little secret. Will unfolds his fingers, sets the picture down on the nightstand, and rests his elbows on his knees, head in his hands. Alana circles the bed and sits beside him. Will doesn't cry, for he's not sad. But his shoulders are shaking, and his head is pounding, and he digs his nails into his temples and slides them into his hair.

Alana shifts forward, delicately takes the old picture and unfolds it, and makes a soft sound. "Wow," she murmurs. "He's…handsome."

Will huffs. "Thought you didn't swing that way."

"I can appreciate the aesthetic," she replies coolly, batting him on the shoulder with her free hand. "You got his curls."

Will closes his eyes, thinking of how often his mother would pet his hair when he was a child. During his senior year, Will shaved his head to a buzzcut before joining the police force, and his mother hadn't said anything, but Will would catch him staring, a deep look of sadness and longing in his eyes.

"I wonder if I ever reminded him of…him." He doesn't even know the guy's name – probably never will. Alana flips the picture, sighs through her nose, and places it face-down on the nightstand again.

"Well, if you ever did, I'm sure you didn't when you grew up," she murmurs, and takes his hand in both her own. "You would have never left him. You stayed, right to the end."

Will nods, and wonders if he'd even recognize the guy if he met him. He laces his fingers through hers and squeezes tightly, breathing in deep. They opened the windows, and stirred up dust, and the light paints the air with fine particles of it, and Will can't even smell his mother in the room anymore.

"Do you want to keep it?" she asks. Will chose to keep one picture – him and his mother, when Will was about thirteen, standing on the side of the lake with fishing poles in hand and dressed in unflattering waders and overalls.

He shakes his head.

She nods, lets out another quiet sound of understanding, and rises, takes the picture and folds it again, and adds it to the pile of newspapers that it turns out his mother kept, long after he'd read them. They'll take them to be recycled, after everything is finished here, and that will be that. A flicker of memory, come and gone, pressed to mulch and given back to the earth.

Will aches. Buried in his makeshift nest, shivering through a terrible bout of withdrawal, both from alcohol and the loss of his mate and child. He wonders, absently, if this is how his mother felt when his Alpha left him. He had a scar on his neck, an old one, whited out from so much time passing since it was made. His stomach burns from the abuse, his shoulders shake, and he doesn't know if he'll be able to stand again, or when the shivering will stop. He's feverish, aching, and he turns his head and bites down on one of the dog beds, ripping it apart just to give his teeth something to do.

He moans, spitting out a saliva-heavy wad of stuffing, and collapses back into the nest. It still holds some of Abigail's and Hannibal's scent, and he wants to push it away, to burn it all, but he can't gather the strength to rise, let alone do it.

So he clings, and breathes them in, and shudders when it cools the fire in his brain.

When he closes his eyes, images of that night flash through his head again. The darkness, the sweltering heat, unseasonable for the month. The scent of blood, the panic – he'd panicked when he smelled it, rushed through the house and yelled for them, needing to make sure they were alright. And he'd seen the kitchen, smeared with it. Seen the open hatch beside the island.

Seen the blood trail, leading down. The basement. Hannibal in his plastic suit, Abigail in an apron, both of them bloodied and shining as he'd taken the liver out of a man and placed it in a gleaming metal tray.

His stomach churns, and he remembers Hannibal mentioning intentions of preparing liver that night. They must have been feeding it to him this entire time, and he shudders, both in sorrow and disgust – at himself. He should have seen the signs. He should have been more aware, more careful. Hannibal is almost textbook, but Will let himself be blinded by his breed, by the presence of his daughter. By their laughter and light. Nose-blind, heartsick, so desperately in love with both of them he would have overlooked anything.

Stupid, he growls to himself. *Stupid.*

And another voice, this one whispering, more insidious and poisonous than alcohol; *Weak*.

Because they don't *need* him. Whatever bond has formed between the three of them, they don't need him. They're probably harvesting another body right now, sitting around their table, happy as clams at high tide. They didn't need him to protect them, they don't need him to keep them safe, they're perfectly capable of doing that themselves.

He's not good enough for them. They kept him around…for what? Entertainment? Convenience? Another piece in the puzzle of their perfect façade – an Alpha groomed and bred to serve them and care for them, to hide them from the outside world. Maybe take the fall, if things went badly for them.

Will drags his hands over his face, moans weakly into his palms. This hurts, *God*, this hurts so fucking badly and Will doesn't know what to do about it. He doesn't know how long the ache will last, how long it takes for a pseudo-bond like this to be broken. Maybe it will never break, and he will merely remain, a shaking shell of a man who can't even sleep.

He freezes, his upper lip curling. Heat blossoms in his skull, and he snarls, and opens his eyes.

No.

No. He would rather die free than live a life like his mother did, always lonely, clinging to a picture of an Alpha whose son he raised and never even fucking told him about.

He won't live like that. He *won't*.

He pushes himself upright, new strength rising in him, and he doesn't know if it's elation, because even as he thinks this, he knows he's doing what Hannibal wants – running back to him, as he always has. But this will not be his game. Will's done playing.

He gets to his feet with another growl, running his hands through his hair. He threw away his phone. Hannibal won't see him coming. He knows from routine that Hannibal will be at his office, but Abigail is due to get out of school soon. He'll get her, first, and then go back.

Go home, his instincts purr.

He ignores it. It's not home – it can't be, not anymore. But it's known ground, common ground, and Hannibal has lost the home advantage. Will knows, now, and he can get evidence if he needs to. Still, his mind rebels against doing anything to hurt his family, but Will isn't going to be left as some shade, some ghost wandering without homeland or aim, no shapeshifting monster that hungers for something that is never satisfied.

If this is to end in blood, then it'll end in fucking blood. By his hands, if necessary.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

this chapter's scenes are all Hannibal's POV. Unreliable narrators are so fun \o/

Abigail returns from her bedroom as soon as Hannibal bids Will a good night, retrieving the Alpha's coat and sending him on his way with a business card for the walk-in clinic where he can get his drug test, as well as a promise to email him the forms to initiate the background check. He watches Will leave, down the little walkway and to the pavement, then to his car, and smiles as he feels Abigail's presence at his back, smells the stir of air that brings her earthy scent to him.

He turns, and she regards him with a tilted head and a raised brow – a perfect mimic of his own disapproving gaze. He returns it and she folds her arms across her chest. "An Alpha?" she asks, and Hannibal sighs through his nose, and leads the way to the kitchen. She falls in step behind him, pushing her braid behind her shoulder to get it out of the way, and grabs a dish towel so she can perform her usual task of drying and putting clean dishes where they should go.

"Didn't you like him?" Hannibal asks lightly, taking and wetting a sponge in the soapy water already there, and grabs the first plate. He scrubs it clean and rinses it with hot water before handing it to her. "I thought he was rather charming, in a rough sort of way."

She gives a very unladylike snort at that. "You just like that he's so obviously desperate to please you," she accuses, without heat. Hannibal grins at her, pleased that, if powers of observation are a product of nurture and not nature, she absorbed it from him easily. They exchange another cleaned and rinsed plate in silence, as she starts a stack for the third. "He used to be a *cop*, mama."

"Yes," Hannibal says. That may prove to be a problem – Will has keen eyes, and a fine-tuned awareness of the moods and mannerisms of the people with whom he is sharing space. If he were to look too closely at them, he may see things that Hannibal has worked very hard to keep hidden. But Will would not be the first person he deceived, and if they manage to gentle him enough, he won't stick his nose where it doesn't belong.

"I'm surprised," she says, after another moment, when the third plate is dried, and she returns from putting the stack away. He hands her his wine glass and she dries it, her brow furrowed, her lips pressed together so they form a thin line. "After the last Alpha…"

Hannibal nods, swallowing back a low growl at the memory of that man. He'd been charming too, well-bred, perfectly conditioned by Baltimore high society to know all the cues and social graces expected of him. He'd been a connoisseur of the arts, inclined to orchestras and

music, and Hannibal had imagined, if she were so inclined, Abigail might learn to play the violin under his tutelage.

"Will has a thick protective streak," he tells her, and she pauses, looking up at him. "When I told him about your father, he was very angry at the idea of anyone hurting you. Hurting either of us."

She smiles at that, faintly. Hannibal knows she holds no lingering affection for her father, not after what she'd seen him try to do. Even before that, her fear-scent had been meshed into his so deeply, Hannibal has no doubt that the day he died she was more relieved than anything else.

"Protectiveness can turn into possessiveness really quickly," she says gently.

Hannibal knows this – he told her as much when she first started dating. Warned her that any slight against her was an offense against him, and would not be tolerated. Her smile widens when she meets his eyes. "But you like him," she says with a small shrug. "Way more than any of the others."

"Oh?" Hannibal asks, brows lifting.

"You haven't exactly made a habit of interviewing them over dinner," she says, her grin widening when Hannibal huffs, and turns his attention back to the dishes. She pauses, drying her and Will's water glasses when handed them. "He's cute," she offers.

Hannibal doesn't roll his eyes, but it's a close thing.

"They say you can trust someone who has dogs. Dogs sense things we don't."

Laymen profiling. Hannibal is sure there's some truth to it – that, combined with Will's history of caring for his Omega parent, paints him as a man solely dedicated to the happiness and safekeeping of others. Hannibal is sure it would take less than a moment in the presence of all Will's dogs to see they are happy, cared for, and thriving under his mastery. A lonely Alpha trying to form his own pack.

"I'm willing to give him a shot," Abigail adds, as he knew she would. Above all else, she certainly inherited his curiosity. It would be interesting, he thinks, to see how a man like Will navigates people like them; all of them with sharp eyes and keen understanding of the human mind. He wonders, absently as he cleans the roasting dish, if Will actually enjoyed that part of his job; delving into the psyche of murderers.

"Excellent," he says, instead of anything else. "I'm happy to hear it."

Abigail is weeping openly as Hannibal drives her home, from Will's house. There sits, in his chest, a sharp backwards pull, compelling him to turn around and drive back to Wolf Trap. Even a hint of Will's scent had speared him deeply, more deeply than he thought it would.

Despite Will smelling sick, heavy with distress, it had been *him*, and Hannibal's mouth floods with saliva, his nose stinging as though clinging to the remnants of it as he takes her home.

"He has to come back," she says weakly, as he parks the car. "He has to."

Hannibal swallows, aching, aching terribly. The skies themselves seem to mock him, a deep stormy blue the same color as the Alpha's eyes. He tries to think of them turning red, tries to imagine Will snarling and feral with panic, but he can't. Even in anger, even cut deep with betrayal, he had not harmed them. Hadn't even tried – simply wanted to be with them, and hugged Abigail and let Hannibal pet his hair, let Hannibal feed him even knowing what he was eating.

He sighs, and squeezes her hand gently. "I hope so, my dear," he tells her, and kisses her palm. "Come. We have work to do."

The kitchen is still smeared with old, black blood, the hatch still open. She follows him inside without a word, takes the cleaner and mop from the pantry and fills a bucket with soap and water as Hannibal goes downstairs. The carcass remains as he'd left it, the liver sitting in the gleaming dish, blood staining the floor and congealed around the drain.

He sighs. The meat is no good after being so long-exposed to lukewarm air, and frankly was barely worth eating in the first place. He fires up the furnace and, once it's roaring faintly, lifts and hauls the body onto the flatbed, and pushes it inside. Throws in, behind it, the organs he'd managed to take before Will found them.

It had been a stupid mistake – a crime of passion if ever there was one. Abigail's boyfriend, a young man named Nick Boyle, fraught over something or other. He'd put his hands on her, bared his teeth, tried to bite her. Hannibal is sure Will would have understood, if he'd given Hannibal time to explain.

Hopes that, somehow, he still might get that chance.

He sighs again, heavily, and turns on the water pipe that runs along the ceiling, steps back as it shoots down in a heavy stream, clearing the floor and encouraging the rest of the blood to drain. The heat of the furnace turns the air humid quickly, plasters his hair and clothes to his skin, and he shivers, feeling abruptly cold on the inside.

He knows, objectively, what to expect from the severing of a bond, even half-formed. A fever, a sickness like the flu. If he succumbs to it, he will not be able to protect Abigail to the best of his abilities.

He turns his head as he hears her coming down the stairs, steps uneven as she tries to negotiate the heavy bucket of water and the mop. She tips it over and it drains with the rest, and Hannibal takes the mop from her, throwing it into the furnace as well. He wraps an arm around her as they stand in the dry spot, watching the evidence be washed away. Once it's dry, he will sanitize it until there lingers no trace of blood, no evidence that this day existed.

Once the floor has returned to a glistening, clear shine, he turns the water off and lets the furnace continue, heating the air and aiding with drying the place. They turn as one, leaving

the bucket behind, and go back upstairs.

Hannibal shuts the hatch and straightens, another tremor of cold running down his spine. "Abigail," he murmurs, drawing her attention. "Do you remember how to get to our cabin, up on the Bay?"

She looks at him with wide eyes, swallows, and nods.

"Good. Go pack yourself a bag. We must leave as soon as we're done here."

"This man was your patient. A Garrett Jacob Hobbs?"

Hannibal nods, pressing his lips together, his eyes falling from the large, imposing-looking Alpha standing over him to take his statement, to the body on the floor. From the angle he can only see knees, ankles, feet, and a single hand splayed out wide as though still trying to reach for him. At his side, a little girl stands and trembles, her big eyes too wide for her face, her pale, chubby cheeks red and shining with tears.

Hannibal sucks in a breath, his claws flexing, and he winces, dabbing his balled-up pocket square against his neck. Despite his best efforts, Hobbs had managed to take a swipe at him, and nicked him just shy of the artery. In that moment Hannibal isn't sure if he meant to force a bond, or meant to kill him, but the attempt was swiftly followed by Hannibal's firm, and final, rebuttal.

He doesn't have to see the body; Hobbs' head is wildly off-angle, neck bulging from the swift sideways snap, eyes staring out, still red. They won't be their normal color again until natural decay greys them out.

"I've been his psychiatrist for a little over two years now," Hannibal says, for he knows the Alpha – Agent Jack Crawford – is waiting for his statement. Normally Hannibal would bristle at the fact that he is being forced to sit, corralled by Alphas and females in well-meaning but unwanted attempts to calm and soothe him, but it's better now that he play the part his breed was designed for; shaken, lost, desperate. Emotions he has not felt since his childhood but can mimic with perfect precision. "He…" He swallows, closes his eyes a second too long, winces as he pulls his hand away from the little claw marks on his neck, showing Jack the blood. Hears the Alpha growl. "I suppose he became very attached to me. He tried to bond with me."

At his side, Abigail trembles, and he reaches for her, pulling her to his side. She is sobbing in silence – he will learn, later, that she is a silent crier, and her shoulders don't move, but her chest hitches in little hiccups of breath that she buries against his hair, wrapping her arms around him.

Jack nods, giving another little righteous growl of offense as he writes on his notepad. "What were you treating him for?"

Hannibal swallows, shifts his weight in his seat, takes on the expression of an unsure, shaken man. "I…. I know it's a moot point, with his passing, but I don't wish to speak ill of the dead." He lifts his eyes, meets Jack's, and then slides them meaningfully to the shaking child in his arms. Jack's lips flatten, and he nods, folding his notepad over.

"Would you be willing to come down to the station, and give an official statement?" Jack asks, and Hannibal nods, and lets his face show grateful relief. "I'll have someone from Child Services come to collect Abigail."

At that, Abigail whimpers, and clings to Hannibal more tightly. He frowns, and shakes his head, letting out a soft whine he knows only Jack can hear, as an Alpha. "She has no family, Agent Crawford," he says gently. "And she has bonded with me. She's mine."

Jack blinks at him, his brow furrowing. Though Hannibal has no biological claim to her, it's unwise to separate an Omega from any child they feel a maternal instinct towards. His eyes slide to Abigail, and Hannibal lets him watch as he pets her hair, pleased when her crying calms somewhat under his touch. She is soothed by him, undoubtedly, and turns her head to look at Jack with big, watery eyes.

"I want to stay with mama," she says, and Hannibal, though he's shocked, smiles. He turns his head and she meets his eyes, and though she is young, there is something steely in her irises, something dark that blinks back at him and grins. She looks back at Jack and lets out a sweet, scared noise. "I wanna stay. Don't take me away from him."

Jack sighs, rubbing a hand over his mouth, and crouches down so their faces are level. "I won't, Abigail, I promise," he says, and then he straightens. "We'll need to do an evaluation of your home, make sure it's appropriate for her, but…" He looks around, and gestures vaguely to Hannibal's opulent office. "I don't think there'll be a problem. You clearly have the means to take care of her."

Hannibal smiles, and Abigail grins brightly, clinging to his shoulders.

"Here." Jack hands him a business card, which Hannibal takes, making sure his fingers give a light tremble as he does so, knowing Jack notices. Hannibal considers it, and straightens as though a thought occurred to him. He looks to his desk, lets his eyes trail idly over the askew notebook, the scattered pens, the letter opener that Hobbs tried to grab and use on him. He slides open a drawer and takes out his own card and hands it back with another shaking hand. Jack takes it. "I'll call you and set up the interview, and arrange the evaluation."

"Thank you, Agent Crawford," Hannibal murmurs, ducking his head in another placative motion, and places his pocket square back on his neck.

"You should have someone look at that," Jack says, nodding to the wound, though it's shallow and not even bleeding anymore. Still, Hannibal gives him a wry, sheepish smile, and ducks his head again. "Thank you for your time, Doctor Lecter. I know this has been an ordeal, but I'll make sure everything goes as smoothly as possible."

"I'm in your debt," Hannibal murmurs. "Thank you again."

Jack nods, and turns away to join his team of forensic investigators, who are all crowded around the body, deliberately shielding it from sight so that the terrified Omega and child don't have to see it. Hannibal turns, and takes Abigail's hands. Meets her eyes, and she smiles at him.

He returns it, and gently touches his fingers to her chin, seeing again that dark thing in her eyes. A creature, sired by her monstrous father, but akin to his own all the same. There is a certain bond, he thinks, that children born and raised in fear share. And her scent is softening, gentling, now that she understands the lion in the room has been slain.

"We should go to your home," he tells her. "Pack everything you wish to bring."

She nods, pressing her lips together. Her eyes lift, to Jack, to the other officers in the room, and she squares her jaw.

"I don't want anything he touched," she says.

Hannibal tilts his head, pleased at that. His eyes drop to her clothes, her over-large t-shirt that was likely her father's at one point, her baggy jeans and worn tennis shoes. "Alright," he says, quiet and soothing, and squeezes her hands. "Then I believe a shopping trip is in order."

Her eyes brighten, and she lets out a little happy noise.

"Careful, my dear," Hannibal says, drawing her into another hug and pressing her face to his neck so her smile is hidden. "Your father just died. You should be sad." He strokes her hair and tugs her back, so she can see he's being serious.

She nods, swallowing. "I can do that," she says, and she understands – pretending, playing a new game. Hannibal smiles widely, and cups her wet cheek. He notices that there are no more tears, no more little hiccups. Perhaps she is just as good at pretending to be weak as he is. How delightful.

Hannibal looks up, a fond smile on his face as he watches Abigail finally be overcome by Will's pack of dogs, as they bark and tug playfully at her coat with soft mouths, tails wagging wildly as they fight to get the ball from her lacrosse stick, and she falls to the ground under a flurry of happy yips and receives a thorough face licking from the big black-brown one.

Will emerges from his home, the front door shutting quietly behind him. His eyes find Hannibal's, his gaze bright with joy, shoulders lax, and in his hands is a steaming cup of something that smells very sweet. Hannibal's chin lifts, curious, and he scents the air as Will brings it to him, holding it out in offering.

"What's this?" he asks.

"Technically, coffee," Will replies, and takes a seat on the floor by Hannibal's feet. There is a single wicker chair in which Hannibal is lounging, and the Alpha seems at home as he settles,

his back to one of the legs, knees bent so he can rest one forearm across them. Hannibal hums, and takes a sip, pleased at the sweet taste of mint and chocolate as it coats his tongue. There is milk here, too, sweetened with sugar, and it hardly tastes like coffee anymore, but it's warm in his hands and stomach, and he lets out a pleased purr, rewarding Will for his mindfulness when it comes to his breed's sweet tooth.

Abigail gives another shriek of laughter, in a playful wrestle with Will's brindle mutt, while the smaller terrier barks and circles her knees. He sees Will's face split into a wide smile, feels the rumble of the Alpha's purr even through the chair.

"I don't think this is particularly useful practice," Hannibal says idly. The lacrosse stick has been abandoned, nosed at curiously by the scruffy little white dog, and Will lifts his head and looks at him, grinning unrepentantly.

"She's having fun," he replies with a shrug. "Sometimes it's good to just have fun."

Hannibal smiles, not inclined to argue. And how could he, when Will and Abigail are so obviously happy? He hasn't heard Abigail laugh so loudly, so obnoxiously happy, for a long while. Not that she is particularly sad, or suffering from bouts of melancholy, but Hannibal's home is a place of learning and safety and comfort. Only since Will has it become flooded with joy and light, the simple kind, where people are merely happy to be in each other's company.

"There's something I wanted to discuss with you," he says, taking another sip of coffee. Will hums, his eyes sliding back to Abigail as the brindle barks at her, tail wagging so wildly his hindquarters move with it. "I have been invited to speak at a pathology conference in California. I will be gone for a week, and since Abigail is in school, I cannot take her with me."

Will looks at him again.

"I'd like to ask you to stay with her, while I'm gone," Hannibal continues, and carefully monitors Will's reaction. Sees his creased brow, the small fissure of anxiety running down his spine, the subtle downward tilt of his lips. "Would you be able to do that?"

"Of course," Will replies, without hesitation, despite his body language. His fingers curl, and flex out again in another sign of displeasure. Hannibal's head tilts.

He sips his coffee again, and when Will doesn't say anything more, he murmurs; "You're uncomfortable."

Will blinks, a fine pink flush coming to his cheeks, and he dips his eyes in a gesture so subservient Hannibal's breath catches, and his fingers tighten around the handle of his cup. Will even bares his throat, petting over his neck in an unconscious move so that Hannibal notices. Interesting.

"I just…." Will clears his throat, his eyes on Hannibal's shoes. "I'm…moved by your trust in me, is all."

"Oh?" Hannibal asks, smiling despite himself.

Will nods, and looks out to Abigail again, sighing heavily. It rained recently, and she's getting thoroughly covered in mud. Hannibal will have to insist they borrow one of Will's towels to save his car's upholstery.

"She's your daughter," he murmurs. "Trusting anyone with your child for that long is a huge gesture. And, forgive me for assuming, you haven't had the best luck with Alphas in the past."

Not untrue, but he's curious why Will would bring it up. Most Alphas would delight in the idea of being alone in a household, where they could assert their scent and authority in the space while the Omega was away, especially in a dynamic such as theirs. If Will lived there, Hannibal's house would stink of him by the time he returned. He's not displeased at the idea – Will has a remarkably sweet, inoffensive scent, like mint chocolate and sugared lemons.

"Do you think it foolish of me, to trust you with her?" he asks, more curious than anything else. After all, Will has been working for him for a little over a month now, and Hannibal has seen no sign of violent inclinations, boorish behavior, or anything untoward happening, either between him and Abigail, or him and Hannibal. Will is remarkably, refreshingly aware of his status and his bearing, and eager not to tread on any toes.

Will swallows, his eyes bright. "No," he murmurs. "Not foolish. I just know how big a deal it is and…. Forgive me." He lets out a sheepish laugh, petting over his neck again, and smiles up at Hannibal. "I'm grateful."

His blush darkens, and he bites his lower lip, and says, so quietly Hannibal almost doesn't hear; "I want to make her happy, and keep her safe."

And the look in his eyes tells Hannibal all he needs to know.

He smiles, and leans forward, setting his cup down on the floor by his feet. He reaches for Will, pleased when Will doesn't shy from him – leans in, in fact, and his lashes lower when Hannibal's hand slides through his hair, gently petting it back from his face and neck.

"I know you will," he purrs, and Will's smile is wide, weak with relief. He swallows and, touching him as Hannibal is, he can feel the flex of his neck, the tightness in his throat that is a bitten-back purr. He cups Will's chin and lifts his head so their eyes can meet again. "I'll be leaving tomorrow night. Pack a bag and come home with us."

It's not a true command, but Will takes it as one. He nods rapidly and pushes himself to his feet, head bowed so that Hannibal's hand lingers for as long as it can. Will's cheeks are pink, his eyes bright with joy, as he sends one last smile out to Abigail and his pack of dogs, and then ducks back inside.

It takes Hannibal longer than he would like to get everything in order, and by the time he has Abigail's and his things loaded in his car, he's almost feverish, sweating finely and panting, his lungs trying desperately to catch any trace of Will's scent even as he leaves his home. His mind rebels against going in a way it seldom has before, an instinct in him clamoring to remain – for if he can't go to his Alpha, surely Will must come to him, and Hannibal needs to be here when he arrives.

He tells Abigail to drive, for he is in no fit state to do it himself. She casts him worried glances, makes soft, anxious sounds, but obeys his order and drives to the highway, heading North where his cabin lies on the upper ridge of the bay.

Every mile drags down his spine like claws, every passing marker and road sign makes him want to bark an order at her to turn around, but he swallows it back. It has been a long time since his body reacted without his mind's command – he had his first heat at sixteen and has been on suppressants since his uncle adopted him, and since then has maintained full and firm control over his needs; hunger, boredom, anger, even desire has all been kept rigorously in check for his entire life. But now he feels weak, stricken to the bone, and is glad Abigail cannot hear how he whines, cannot see how his hands shake as township and colonization is left behind and they are immersed in the trees.

The cabin is sterile and cold, and Hannibal has just enough wherewithal to light a fire and open the windows, flooding the place with the scent of pine and ocean spray, before he must sit on one of the couches, breathing heavily.

Abigail comes to him, a warm, wet cloth in her hand, and presses it to his forehead, clambering onto the couch beside him. He shivers, taking her free hand and pressing her wrist to his nose, for while she is not biologically his daughter, his instincts are soothed by her presence.

She swallows, and noses at his temple, sighing heavily. "You smell sick, too," she says. Hannibal nods, gritting his teeth as another frantic pull builds up in his chest, worse than nausea or hunger. He aches, terribly, to the point where it feels like his bones are trembling, too weak to hold his weight. He closes his eyes and tips his head back, blowing out another hard breath. "Mama, we can go back. I don't want you to get sick."

Hannibal sighs.

She gets up after a moment, and goes to their coats, retrieving their cell phones. She brings them back and places them on the little coffee table in front of him, and lets out a soft whimper of distress. "He hasn't called."

Hannibal sighs again, swallowing back his whine. His head is pounding, the heat of the fire doing nothing to calm him tremors, the sunlight streaming in from the wall of windows making his eyes ache even behind his eyelids.

He reaches out, blindly, and takes her hand. Squeezes it. "We need to get supplies," he tells her. "There's a grocery store a few miles away. Take the car, and your phone."

She shakes her head. "I'm not leaving you."

"Abigail," he snaps, harsher than he'd meant to. He softens his voice immediately, cracks open his eyes and presses the warm cloth to his forehead. "There's no food here, nothing that we need to survive. I…" He swallows again, cursing his own weakness, his own foolishness, for he let it get this far and now he's suffering the consequences. "I need you to be strong, right now."

She squeezes his hand tightly, and nods, her face pale and drawn with anxiety. She nods again, and gets to her feet, and leans over to kiss his hair.

"I'll be gone less than an hour," she promises, and takes her phone. "Try and get some sleep."

Hannibal sighs, nodding again. He closes his eyes and listens to her don her jacket, grab his car keys, and leave out the front door. As soon as it closes, the ache in his chest builds, tightens, howling now at the loss of both mate and daughter. She will return, but Will is gone, far, far away, and as he is now, Hannibal is in no state to go after him.

He manages to get himself to a lying position, curled up and shivering and utterly miserable. This isn't sickness, not a physical kind. Wholly psychological, deeper than biology, but he cannot overcome it. There is no treatment, nothing he can do, except the one thing he can't possibly do.

He reaches out and grabs his phone, tucking it under his chest so that he will feel it vibrate and hear it if it should ring. Sleep, when it comes, is light and fitful, but when he wakes again, Abigail is there, placing thick blankets over his body. All the windows are closed and the fire is burning, and she lies down on top of him and finally, finally, his tremors ease somewhat.

Hannibal enters his home and is immediately assaulted with the scents of cooking rice, spiced meat, capsaicin, thyme, oregano. He frowns, hanging his jacket and loosening his tie, and follows his nose towards the kitchen.

In it, he finds Will, and Abigail sitting on a bar stool, bent over a spread out stack of papers. She's grinning and taking a spoon from Will, tasting whatever he's offered her. On the stove sits a huge pot, steaming around a half-closed lid. Hannibal frowns, eyeing the grease stains and mess on his counters, and lifts his head when Will looks up.

He smiles widely, and takes the spoon from Abigail when it's handed back. Hannibal shrugs off his jacket and places it over the back of her chair, before wordlessly going to inspect what Will is cooking. He breathes in deeply, smells the starch of the rice, and takes a dishtowel, folding it over his knuckles and lifting the lid.

"…Jambalaya?" he hazards.

Will grins at him, looking remarkably pleased with himself. "My mom used to make it for me before we moved up here," he says. "Perfect cold weather food, he'd call it." At Hannibal's

look, Will huffs, and rolls his eyes with a playful smile. "What was I gonna do, give *your* daughter McDonald's? I'm not suicidal."

Hannibal blinks at him, laughs, and replaces the lid carefully. It's the first time since Will started working for him that he's mentioned anything about his mother, or his childhood. Inwardly, the part of him that revels in control of his kitchen and his home rebels at the idea of Will making himself at home, but that part is easily overcome, for he cannot deny he is pleased to see Will so comfortable, and so obviously trying to provide for them.

"I couldn't reach you, and didn't know when you'd be home," Will explains, softening now, his shoulders curling in. He fidgets with the spoon, and Hannibal looks to Abigail, finds her watching them with raised brows and bulging cheeks as she tries not to smile. Another part of Hannibal purrs at the idea of Will referring to this place as home as well.

"It's no trouble," he says, and smiles, and reaches for Will, rewarding him with another soft touch to his neck and shoulder. He lowers his voice as Will swallows, unconsciously leaning into the touch. "And it smells wonderful. Will it be ready soon?"

"Yeah," Will murmurs, his cheeks pink from the heat of the kitchen. He smiles wide enough to show his fangs, lifts his chin and meets Hannibal's eyes. Hannibal smiles, brushing his knuckles gently under Will's jaw, admiring the softness of his facial hair, before he lets his hand drop. "It's got about another half hour."

"Good," Hannibal purrs, and circles the island to stand beside Abigail. He eyes the papers in front of her, sees that it is a first draft of one of her essays, marked with red, and she's working on handwriting the second – one of the things Hannibal likes about her school. Coursework is done by hand, in class, and the final essay is typed up at the end for grading and submissions. He pets over her hair and kisses the top of her head in greeting.

"Do you need help with anything?" Will asks, shifting his weight behind the island, his expression eager and earnest as Hannibal meets his gaze. "Like I said, we've got about a half hour left. Would you like something to drink? Or…"

He trails off, his blush deepening, and Hannibal can practically smell Abigail's delighted amusement.

"Thank you, Will, I'm alright," he murmurs, watching the Alpha's shoulders sag as though in disappointment. His head tilts, considering, conceding; "Perhaps you'll help me set the table. Abigail normally does so, but clearly she has work to do."

Will brightens immediately, and nods, setting the spoon down and correcting the lid over the pot. "Yeah! Sure. I'd be happy to."

Hannibal smiles, and gestures for Will to come to him. "Follow me."

Abigail's phone rings a little before dusk, and Hannibal feels no better, is still a shivering mess of tension and longing as they stir, and she sits up, wiping at her mouth and over her eyes. She frowns at her phone, and reaches for it, holding the display so they can both see.

It's the house number.

She swallows, and answers, putting it on speaker. "Hello?"

"*Abigail*." It's said roughly, barely more than a breath, but Hannibal's chest tightens and his heart soars, because it's Will. It's *Will.* He sits up straighter, panting, his lungs unable to rationalize the fact that he can hear the Alpha, but cannot smell him, for Will isn't here. "Where are you? Are you alright?"

"I'm -. I'm fine, da -. Will. We're both fine. We're both safe."

Will is quiet for a moment, and then lets out a ragged, broken sound. It feels like heartbreak. "You're not…. You're not *here*," he says, and Hannibal closes his eyes, because they should be, they should be there. "Where are you?"

Abigail swallows, and says, "You're at the house?" Hannibal reaches out and squeezes her free hand, unable to voice his gratitude that she's smart enough not to tell him where they are. Neither he nor Will are thinking clearly, and until they know Will's thoughts, his motivations, it's dangerous to invite him here while the bond is being broken.

Will makes another sound, weak and wanting, and Hannibal's stomach clenches up and rolls with something like nausea, but much more painful. His fingers curl in the couch and his shoulders go tense. "Did you drive there?" Abigail asks, for she knows if Hannibal's behavior is anything to go by, Will should not be driving.

Will laughs – it's a sharp, bitter sound. "No," he growls. "I fuckin' -. I fuckin' ran."

Hannibal's eyes widen, and he blinks at the phone. "You ran," he whispers.

Will whimpers quietly, and Hannibal regrets speaking immediately. "Hannibal," he breathes, and in his name is another deep ache, a heavy-set pang of longing screaming at him to rise, to take Abigail and go home where their Alpha is waiting for them. He hates this feeling, hates how utterly pure and real it is. There's no hiding from sensation this strong.

"Where are you?" Will asks again. "Please. Please tell me where you are. Or come home. I need -." He stops with another weak growl, and Hannibal can imagine him as he was so many nights in their home, frantic with the need to protect them, trembling as Hannibal is now, and only settled when he had them both in his arms and could keep watch during storms and dark nights.

He doesn't understand, can't understand how Will's anger could so abruptly turn to begging. And yet he understands completely.

Abigail's jaw clenches, and her eyes are wet, but she doesn't let the tears fall. She straightens in place and lifts the phone to her mouth, speaking into the receiver; "We're safe," she tells

him, soothing him as best she can. "We're going to stay safe. Away from you."

"*No*, Abigail, please -."

"You sent us away," she says, and Hannibal turns his head, can't bear to listen to the sound of Will's soft whimper. "You can't just change your mind and expect us to believe you. You know the truth, now, and you rejected it. You rejected us."

If Hannibal were in his right mind, he might be proud of her for being so strong for his sake. But he isn't in his right mind, and hates that he isn't proud.

"Please," Will begs, barely more than a breath. "Please. Let me prove that I -. I can't. I – *fuck*."

Her tears do fall, now, and Hannibal breathes in, able to smell them. He reaches for her with a shaking hand and wraps his hand around the phone.

"Goodbye, Will."

"Hannibal, *please* -." He ends the call before he can hear any more, and collapses onto the couch with no more grace than a piece of wet clothing. The tremors have returned, and he feels he can hardly see. He's shaking, the fire died down to mere embers, and Abigail stands, adding another log to it so the flames have more fuel to burn. The air is warm, he knows it's warm because he can smell the light tease of Abigail's sweat, but Hannibal doesn't feel it.

She wraps her arms around him, corrects the blankets over his shoulders, and kisses his hair. "I'm sorry, mama," she whispers. "I didn't want him to find us like this."

Hannibal manages a nod. "You did well," he replies. He should get up – perhaps cooking or organizing the place will soothe him, but the aching wrongness, the lack of Will, spears him in place. He can't bring himself to move more than to turn his head and wrap an arm around her shoulders, holding her close.

"What do you think he'll do?" she asks.

"I don't know," he replies, and hates the uncertainty as much as everything else. Will has always been, at his core, a little too far on the side of unpredictable for Hannibal to be able to assess him, and right now his inner need is projecting far too much. If he were Will, he thinks he would tear the world apart to be with his lost mate and daughter. This is the kind of thing Alphas go feral for.

He sighs, and shakes his head. "Do you think you'll be able to manage dinner?"

She gives him a weak smile. "I didn't watch you cook all those years for nothing," she says, too-lightly. She kisses his hair, squeezes his shoulders, and rises from the couch. "I'll make us something to eat." Hannibal nods, no energy in him to tell her he likely won't be able to stomach much right now. It would be a shame to waste food, no matter his temperament.

He lies down, and cradles his phone in his hand, hoping, despite all he knows, that Will might try and call them again.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

> This chapter has both Hannibal and Will POV scenes. Hopefully it's not too confusing. Enjoy!

Will surges awake with a frantic cry, his bed and clothes soaked with sweat, heat plastered to his face and neck, and scrambles for his gun, tucked beneath the pillow. Even though it's not loaded, he reaches for it, only remembering that he doesn't keep it beneath his pillow in Hannibal's house; he doesn't want Abigail to find it.

There's a shadow sitting on the edge of his bed, and a warm, strong hand grips his wrist, pinning him down, another sliding into his hair and tightening firmly around the back of his neck. He goes still with a whimper, half-curled onto his side, and grips, finds a knee and squeezes.

"Hush, Will, it's just me." Hannibal, that's Hannibal's voice. Will breathes out, exhale shuddering, and lets himself go limp. "Forgive me for intruding – you were having a nightmare. I was worried you'd wake Abigail."

Will nods. He is blessed with never remembering his dreams, except for this one – the one with a huge black stag tearing its way out of a girl's chest, enthroned in flame, a demon on its back and staring at Will with all the terror of Hell in its eyes. They started when he was a cop, grew worse when his mother got sick, and since he started looking at crime scene photos for Jack, they've only gotten worse.

"I'm sorry," he whispers. "Is she okay?"

"She's fine, I checked on her before coming to you," Hannibal replies. He slides his hand through Will's hair, petting it from his sweaty face, and gently coaxes Will so he's sitting more upright, one arm braced beneath him to keep him up.

Unresisting, too weak and shaken to deny himself, Will turns his head, sighs as Hannibal cradles his face and lets him press his cheek to Hannibal's chest, soaking in the pulse of his steady heart, breathing in his sweet scent.

"I'm sorry if I woke you."

"I was awake."

Will nods, sucking in another deep breath, letting Hannibal's scent and strength calm his trembling, lower his heart rate, and flood his brain with satisfaction, for Hannibal isn't afraid,

even in the wake of Will's distress. He's safe, he's happy and sweet, and Will is settled by that.

"Would you like to talk about it?" Hannibal offers after another quiet moment.

Will shakes his head, nuzzling Hannibal's collarbone, breathing out again. "Not really."

Hannibal accepts that with a hum, and lifts Will's head. The moon is bright outside, allowing him a view of Hannibal's face, cloaked in silver, eyes dark. He offers Will a smile, and Will smiles back, though it's weak, and closes his eyes.

"Do you often have night terrors?" he asks. Will swallows, turns his cheek to press more firmly against Hannibal's palm. He sighs.

"They're getting more frequent, since I've started helping Jack."

Hannibal huffs. "Perhaps you should stop helping Jack, then."

Will sighs. "Yeah. Maybe."

"I mean it, Will. As your employer I have no issue with you splitting your time, but as your friend, I am deeply worried for you."

A shiver runs down Will's spine, for the way Hannibal says the word, and the way Will feels when he says it, he's sure they crossed the line of friendship months ago, and left it behind, to fade into something more. Hannibal still treats him with calm fondness, liberal with both physical affection and with praise as most of his breed are, but the more time Will spends with him and Abigail, the more he feels it shifting, growing claws and strength in the darkness.

But he can't acknowledge it, for if he's wrong, or if he oversteps, he'll lose everything. He moves his hand from Hannibal's knee and fists his fingers in the damp sheets instead, knuckles going white. Hannibal seems content to remain, gently, idly petting his hair, nails scratching over the nape of his neck.

"I'll call Jack in the morning," Will promises. "Tell him I'm done."

Hannibal is silent, for a moment, and then he lets out a loud, pleased purr, one that shakes Will to his foundations and makes his lips part in a silent gasp. It is a motion Hannibal is quick to react to – he leans in, finds Will pliant and eager, and their lips touch, chaste at first.

Will shivers, and parts his lips further, whining when Hannibal licks between his teeth, over the point of one of his fangs. It sends a jolt through Will, and he reaches for Hannibal, a soft moan escaping him as Hannibal deepens the kiss, holds Will's face with gentle, warm hands, and he's solid and strong in Will's arms, as he shifts his weight, one knee on the bed, and eases Will onto his back, looming over him until the moonlight is taken from his face, silhouetted by his back and shoulders.

He kisses Will deeply, passionate for all its softness, and Will burns on the inside, spreading his thighs as Hannibal fits a knee between them – not close enough to provide friction,

though Will isn't thinking about that – but Will can grip his leg and wrap one ankle over his, curled up in wet bedsheets and fever-warm skin.

Hannibal's fingers wrap in his hair, and tug, making Will gasp, and he presses his teeth to Will's lower lip, biting down like he's aching for a deeper taste, sharp enough that it stings. Will moans, weakly, his hands flat and wide on Hannibal's shoulders, wanting to claw, to pull him in.

He resists. Barely.

Hannibal pulls back from him, breathing hard, and Will's lungs ache, his mouth dry as he smells, very faintly, a trace of budding slick. It's sweet and coats his tongue, makes his stomach clench up tightly with the beginnings of something more urgent than typical hunger.

"Hannibal, I -."

Hannibal shushes him, brushing a thumb over Will's wet mouth, and takes his hands away. "Get some sleep, darling," he murmurs. It's the first time he calls Will that, but it's far from the last. Will swallows, and lets him go, not wanting to overstep or make Hannibal feel like he's being forced. Hannibal rises from the bed, bathed in moonlight once more, and gives him a smile.

After Abigail's adoption was handled, Hannibal's home and lifestyle evaluated for suitability, and her guardianship entrusted to him, he gave her one of the guest bedrooms and cleared it out, taking her shopping for anything and everything she might need or want. Unlike the other preteens he saw, clinging to their parents or wandering listlessly through furniture stores, or disappearing only to come back and beg for a toy they wanted, she remained at his side – not overbearing, but not keen to wander either. Despite the fact that any clothes she picks out will likely be outgrown quickly, he spares no expense, and takes her happily into any story that catches her eye, buys expensive sheets and a duvet cover that's patterned to look like a sunset on the horizon.

"You have a lot more money than my dad did," she tells him, as they walk out of yet another store, laden with bags. Hannibal arranges all the furniture to be delivered to the house, and what stores do offer courier services, he takes them up on, but even still both he and Abigail are hauling their fair share of new things.

Hannibal nods, smiling down at her. "I was fortunate to have a large inheritance, and being a doctor pays well."

She looks up at him, absorbing that information. She frequently has the look of a blank page, and Hannibal feels like she soaks in every word he says, unspoken cues and body language, tone, sensing and reflecting on everything he says as well as everything he doesn't say. She's a sharp child, brimming with potential. Hannibal is very lucky to know her.

"How much money do you have?" she asks.

Hannibal smiles. "Enough that you will never want for anything," he replies, and gently squeezes her shoulder. "As long as it's reasonable."

She grins at him, wide and bright.

He returns it. "Now, I think we are due for a little break. Come, my dear, let's get something to eat."

Hannibal smiles, opening the door and ducking his head in a deferential nod. "Agent Crawford," he greets, charming and polite. "Missus Crawford. Wonderful to see you both again. Please, come in."

"Good evening," Bella replies, her voice soft and low. She is a pleasant woman, with a gentle honey-like scent that compliments her husband's. Jack always smells of leather and gunpowder, a thin undercurrent of borderline anger that Hannibal worked hard to get used to. Now he knows it is simply a part of him.

He hangs their coats and leads them into the dining room, where Abigail and Will are setting the table. As owner of the house, Hannibal is free to make introductions between the foreign Alphas, and he smiles at Will, going to him and squeezing his shoulder lightly before turning to Jack. "Allow me to introduce Will Graham. Will, this is Agent Jack Crawford, and Bella Crawford." He gestures between them. "Agent Crawford and I met by way of Abigail's father."

Will's eyes flash, a soft flicker of outrage passing through his irises at the reminder. He sets the plate he was holding down, and nods, offering his hand to Jack, who takes it, and the Alphas exchange a single, firm shake. Then, Will cups Bella's offered hand and squeezes it, much more gently, giving her a warm smile.

"It's great to meet you both," he says, and his voice is low and sweet, the same way he speaks to Hannibal – deferential, naturally, acknowledging the long-lasting relationship between Jack and Hannibal and accepting his role as lesser Alpha when Jack is around.

After Abigail became his, Hannibal went out of his way to invite Jack and Bella to his home for monthly dinners, wanting to maintain a good rapport with the man and keep a relationship going, both for Abigail's sake, and his own. He soon won Jack over with his cooking, and let him see how happy Abigail was – is – under his care.

On cue, Abigail grins, and circles the table to give Bella a warm hug. The women embrace tightly; lingering maternal instinct made Bella fall in love with Abigail quickly. This was all by design, of course, but Hannibal is still pleased to see it working so well.

"How do you know each other?" Jack asks. He takes Will's seat, on the left of the head of the table, Bella next to him. If Will has any protests about this, he doesn't voice them, merely offers to fetch Jack something to drink, and disappears into the kitchen when he's asked for wine.

"Will's my new babysitter," Abigail says brightly, circling to her chair on the right of the head. She sets her hands on the back of it. "He's been with us a few weeks now."

"How is that going?" Bella asks.

"Wonderful," Hannibal murmurs, and Abigail nods, taking her seat. "I daresay the three of us fit together remarkably well."

Jack nods, accepting this – he has always trusted Hannibal's care of Abigail, after all, and has no reason to doubt his judgement. Will returns with a tray in his hands, balancing four glasses of red wine, and a glass of orange juice for Abigail, and two glasses of water for her and himself. He places the glasses on their coasters and sets the tray at the second head of the table.

Hannibal goes to the kitchen to retrieve the meal. On each plate is a thick cut of 'beef' wellington, with a crunchy, flaky outside to satisfy the Alphas, rich, creamy potatoes, and a blended glaze of sweet apples to sate his own palette. He brings them out in three, at first, serving Bella, then Abigail, then a plate for himself. He goes back to get the last two, and serves Will first, and then Jack, before he takes his seat.

"This looks wonderful, as always," Bella says. Hannibal smiles at her, lets her see him nod in a demure acknowledgement. Will's and Jack's plate is pink around the edges from the meat, Bella's less so – she prefers her meat a little more cooked.

They sit in a moment of silence, and Hannibal looks at Will, finds him watching Jack. It is customary to let the higher-ranked Alpha take the first bite, and Will has accepted his role at their table with grace, though Hannibal senses he would protest if he had the confidence to. Jack eyes Will, his gaze flashing in understanding when he realizes that Will isn't going to be the first one to eat – he is acknowledging Jack's higher standing in their group.

Hannibal hides his smile, praising Will silently for his remarkably keen sight, his immediate understanding that this will help win Jack's favor. Jack takes a bite, lets out a soft purr of pleasure at the taste of meat, and Will's shoulders lower, as he takes his own. As he does, Bella, Abigail, and Hannibal begin to eat as well.

It's not the most extravagant meal he's ever prepared, but the meat is warm and richly flavored, the crust the perfect consistency, and he can taste the thick cream and butter in the potatoes, as he dips his mouthful in the apple glaze and eats it. Will is purring openly, either forgetting or unashamed at the idea that there is another person besides Hannibal that can hear him do it.

"So, Will, tell me a bit about yourself," Jack says after a moment, washing his mouthful down with wine.

Will tilts his head, clears his throat. "Not much to tell," he says with a shrug. "Born and raised in Louisiana, moved up here to take care of my mom." Bella lets out a hum at that, politely curious. Will lifts one shoulder in a shrug. "He was sick, and there was a drug trial up here for him, but it, ah, didn't take. When he died I saw Doctor Lecter's ad for a caretaker, and here we are."

Hannibal blinks, smiling at Will's use of his title instead of the more intimate way he says his first name. Another point in his favor, he senses, as Jack nods. More favor still, at the mention of taking care of a sick Omega parent right up to the end.

"What did you do in Louisiana, before coming up here?" he asks.

"I was a homicide detective," Will says.

Jack's eyes flash, and his chin lifts. "Really."

Will nods. His head tilts again. "You're an agent," he says. "FBI?"

"Yes," Jack replies. "I'm a lead with the Behavioral Analysis Unit down in Quantico."

Will's eyes flash at that, and he straightens, his expression keenly interested. "What's that like?" he murmurs.

"Stressful," Bella says, with a playful smile sent Jack's way. "I keep telling him to retire, but he won't listen."

Both Will and Hannibal laugh, at that. "I imagine Will is perfectly suited to understand why," Hannibal says, sending a warm smile Will's way. Will flushes, smiling down at his plate, for he knows it's praise even if Hannibal doesn't directly say it. "Forgive me for generalizing, but it's no secret that Alphas love a good hunt."

"It's well said," Jack replies with a smile. Will nods. "If I could, I wouldn't stop until every son of a bitch was behind bars." Bella huffs, and Jack winces, looking to Abigail. "Pardon my French."

She grins at him.

"My mom used to read the paper to me, and then I did it for him when he was in hospital," Will says, nodding. "Baltimore and Virginia have quite the reputation." Jack grunts in acknowledgement – not displeased, but in agreement. "There's certainly plenty to hunt here."

Hannibal smiles, a coil of curiosity burning in his chest, and he says, "Yes. Jack, you were telling me about your investigation last time you were here. On the Chesapeake Ripper, yes?"

Jack nods, and then sighs. "He's still in the wind," he mutters.

"Oh, right," Will murmurs, and his brow creases, and he takes a sip of wine. "The reports I've read about him are…interesting." The way he says it sounds like he wants to say something else.

Jack notices, and regards him with a single raised brow.

"Well, I mean, you know he's Omega, right?"

Hannibal's hands go still. He blinks, surprised, and shares a brief look with Abigail before their attention turns to Jack and Will.

"How do you figure?"

"Surely this isn't appropriate talk for dinner," Bella says, somewhat sharply. Will flinches, ducking his eyes down.

"Sorry, you're right."

"No, Will, I'd like to hear your reasoning," Jack says, holding up a hand to stay Bella's protest. "Please."

Will hesitates, looking Hannibal's way, and Hannibal makes sure his expression is nothing short of pleased interest, wanting to tug on the instinct in Will to satisfy his own curiosity. Will's lips twitch up, he clears his throat, and runs a hand through his hair.

"The Ripper's victims are always displayed with an almost theatrical cruelty," he says. "It's extravagant, and points to someone who has a lot of time and dedication to perfect the message he's trying to send. A meticulousness inconsistent with Alphas, or women, generally. On top of that, every murder betrays a…singular offense." He hesitates, like he's not sure that's the right word, but soldiers on when Hannibal smiles at him; "He chooses his victims carefully, and displays them carefully, and it's because they did something to him that made him angry. I know why people might think he's an Alpha, just because of how brutal the kills are, but of everyone in our society, it's the Omegas who are most abused, who are often perceived as lesser, and…. I don't know." He waves his hand, giving a weak, sheepish laugh. "I think if anyone has a right to take out their frustrations so completely, it would be an Omega."

Jack's head tilts, his eyes dark and focused on Will with a shrewd, keen light. "You got all that from articles in the news?" he asks.

Will sighs through his nose, shakes his head again, and turns his attention back to his food. "I know human nature, Agent Crawford," he says firmly – not challenging, but not willing to back down either. He slices off another thick chunk of meat, coating it in the glaze. "And I was very good at what I did, back in Louisiana."

He takes his bite, with a finality that makes Hannibal smile widely.

Jack studies him carefully, and then he reaches into his jacket pocket, pulling out a thin, white business card, and holds it out to Will. "Maybe, if you have time, you'd be willing to come to Quantico and take a better look," he says, in a tone that leaves no room for real argument. Will swallows his food, and takes the card, setting it down by his wine glass. "I'd like to know what you think when you see it for real."

Will nods. "Happy to," he replies, "providing Doctor Lecter doesn't need me for anything."

Hannibal smiles, delighted beyond belief. "I'm sure I can spare you for a day," he purrs, and Will flushes, biting his lower lip, and ducks his head so that his hair hides his eyes.

Below the table, Abigail nudges her foot to Hannibal's, the look in her wide eyes clearly asking what the Hell he thinks he's playing at. Hannibal merely smiles at her, for he is sure that, while Will is brilliant and has very sharp eyes, he won't think of them when he looks at the crime scene photos. If his and Abigail's kills have proven anything, it's that not even the best and brightest suspect them.

Knowing what he knows, now, it's impossible to be in Hannibal's home and not feel different when he sees it. The kitchen has been cleaned to a spotless shine, no trace of the blood stain Will had seen before, and he snarls, and kneels on the floor, feeling for the near-untraceable dip of the hatch. He finds it, and opens it, going downstairs as the lights flicker on. The furnace is burning and there's a sharp scent of bleach, the tang of burning flesh. His upper lip curls back, eyeing the shining steel, the stainless chrome, the wet floor.

So, he cleaned up after himself, before disappearing. Whether it was so that Will couldn't incriminate them, or because it's habit, he doesn't know, but he isn't angered by that. Rather, a treacherous flicker of pleasure and aching need rise up in him, for his mate is brilliant and clever, and even sick he knows better than to incriminate himself.

He's strong, he's so strong, and fearless, and – yes, even beautiful. Still. Will's fingers shake as he approaches the table on which the body had been. Will hadn't seen the face, but the scent had been Alpha, foreign and wrong for how used to his own scent he'd gotten. This place doesn't smell like him, and he snarls, petting over his neck and brushing his hands absently along the table, filled with the undeniable urge to mark his territory.

But they're not *here*, and they should be here. Will can protect them, here, he can keep them safe, but they're gone – his mate is sick and his daughter is scared and they're *not here*.

They don't need him, but they do need him, and Will needs them, he needs to be around them even though his stomach turns and his brain feels too hot to think – there's no room in there for higher function, nothing he can focus on that isn't the terrible, desperate need to press his nose to Hannibal's neck, to wrap his arms around Abigail's shoulders, to quiet their trembling and see them well-fed and make sure they're okay and safe with him.

His entire body aches with exhaustion – from Wolf Trap to Baltimore is no small drive, and practically sprinting from one place to the other had done him no favors whatsoever. Even still, his heart feels too slow, his fingers trembling with cold. He goes back upstairs, shutting off the light and closing the hatch, and opens the fridge. Inside are packs of raw meat – Will assumed Hannibal went to one of those fancy butchers and simply avoided pre-packaged food, but now he sees it for what it is.

His upper lip twitches. Stupid, to leave this much evidence behind.

But throwing it away is unthinkable. These are his mate's kills, his mate's hunt. To dishonor him like that is paramount to treason and Will can't, *can't*, throw it all away. So he reaches in, grabs a vacuum-sealed pair of kidneys, and goes to the sink, tearing it open so the juice falls into it. He bites into the organs raw, knowing what it is, knowing what it came from. It tastes no different from how he imagines all raw meat tastes – faintly like pork, bloody, rich with iron. He eats them both, and as he swallows, his stomach clenches with sudden hunger.

Alpha eats first, and he's starving.

He goes back to the fridge, finds sausages and ground – well, it's not beef, but he calls it beef for lack of anything else to call it. It's the only raw things left, and he tears into them over the sink again, barely tasting the meat except to know that it's bloody, and oddly sweet – Omega. An Omega gave this. The sausage is spicy – Alpha. An Alpha made this.

He closes his eyes, frowning, and tries to think if he'd noticed that before. Finds it impossible to remember, for those things only bring with them emotions, gut-deep feelings of joy and hunger, for it was Hannibal's food, coupled with Hannibal's smile, his purr, Abigail's sweet laugh, his heavy wine -.

Will opens his eyes, and looks towards the wine cabinet. Most of it is fancy foreign shit he can barely pronounce the name of, but there sits, in the bottom, unlabeled bottles that Hannibal claimed he brewed and made himself. The fancy stuff is for guests, and within the first month, Will was performing as guinea pig to all the new flavors. Suspicion curls in his chest, wondering why Will alone was the one that got to taste that wine. Will goes to the cabinet, opens the door and crouches down, and opens one.

He breathes in, and – *oh*.

Even knowing what it is he's smelling, the scent of the wine-like sweetness hits his tongue, settles on the roof of his mouth, makes his teeth feel too sharp. He tips the bottle back, drowning in the sweet taste, and he knows, he knows that, somehow, Hannibal found a way to put himself in this as well. He's been feeding Will his pheromones – blood, slick, Will doesn't know, but this bottle tastes like Hannibal, a sweet after-flavor that makes his gut clench, *hard*.

He drains the bottle, gasping, and reaches for another. This one is half-full – one of Will's favorites, blackberry and syrupy, and he breathes it in raggedly, curling in on himself over the lip of the bottle. *Mate, mate,* his brain screams it at him, knowing what he's smelling now – that sweetness he couldn't identify, and when he asked Hannibal what it was, he had received merely a fond, playful smile, and a warm hand in his hair.

"Maybe one day, you'll find out."

Oh. "Oh, *God*," Will growls, as he finishes the second bottle, his stomach churning in sudden recoil as the raw meat and heavy wine settles within it. He won't vomit, he won't waste anything Hannibal gave him, or left behind for him to find.

He can't stay here, knowing what he knows. Not for the fact that he understands, now, understands more deeply than anyone else could – no, it doesn't matter, now, because they're not *here* and he should be where they are.

He swallows, and goes to the phone in the study, dialing Abigail's phone number again. It rings, and rings, and rings.

It is with a sudden pang that Hannibal's appetite returns, and he manages to rise from the couch, which is now damp with his sweat, and stumbles to the kitchen to find Abigail, plating up a batch of scrambled eggs mixed with cubed ham. She blinks at him, and, wordlessly, slides it over along with a bag of red grapes, and hands him a fork, turning around to make a second meal as he starts to eat.

He devours it all ravenously, not even savoring the meat, the eggs – only the grapes register as something pleasurable, remarkably sweet and wet as he consumes over half of the bag before he begins to feel somewhat full.

She sits next to him with her own plate, gives him a thin smile, and starts to eat. "Are you feeling any better?"

Hannibal shakes his head, rubbing both hands over his face, and rises, grabbing a glass and filling it with water from the refrigerator. He drinks the first glass in three large gulps, barely acknowledging that his behavior is terribly uncouth, before he fills the glass again and forces himself to sip it slower, soothing the ache on his tongue.

Abigail hums, and looks at her phone as it starts to vibrate on the counter. She sighs. "He's been calling all night," she murmurs. Hannibal registers that with an absent nod, noting from the clock on the oven that it's a little past eleven at night. "Mama, what are we going to do?"

The phone stops vibrating, and Hannibal sighs.

"Once the bond is broken, any physical side effects will stop," he tells her. "He'll stop calling, then." He says it with confidence, though in truth, he's not so sure. He sips at his water again and takes his seat beside her. "And if he doesn't, we'll…fix the problem, as we always have."

Her eyes brim with tears, and she swallows harshly. "I don't want to hurt him," she confesses. Hannibal knows that – he doesn't want to hurt Will, either, but if he must…

He reaches out and pets a hand over her hair, settling between her tense shoulders. "You won't have to," he promises. Since she was a child, he insisted that she participate, and learn. He won't make her, this time. He won't make her watch. "I'll take care of it, and we'll honor him as the blessing and friend that he was."

She swallows, and tears fall, her shoulders shaking. He sighs, and pets her again, before he wraps both hands around his water glass, elbows on the table, and lifts it to his forehead, the

cool condensation doing nothing to abate the fever that rages like a wildfire in his brain.

When Hannibal leaves for his conference, Will stays in his house, only going home in the middle of the day to let out his dogs and feed them, and once again at night once Abigail is asleep to do the same. If they protest his absence, they give no sign of it, and he sighs, wondering if they even miss him when he's gone.

He takes her to school, picks her up, ferries her to lacrosse practice and debate and the rehearsal hall when she asks him to. He is painfully aware of the moments when they are alone, too gun-shy, too scarred by his old job and what little Hannibal has told him from people in the past trying to take advantage of her.

She notices, of course. She has her mother's keen eyes.

"Hey, Will?" she asks, and Will goes tense, looking up from the sink full of soapy dishes from their dinner together. Hannibal showed him his recipe book and rolodex, and while Will's cooking is nowhere near his level of mastery, he has tried to make capable attempts every night and doesn't think it wrong to say he's managed pretty well.

He looks at her, sees her leaning against the door frame, at the entrance that leads to the dining room, watching him with a tilted head and sharp eyes. He clears his throat, and looks down at the dishes. "What's up?"

"What do you do with yourself, when you're not around looking after me or my mom?"

Will presses his lips together, and lifts his shoulders in a shrug. "Oh, you know," he says weakly.

"No, I don't know, that's why I'm asking."

She's grinning at him, and Will flushes, shaking his head. "Um, I guess I just kind of…sit around. Look after the dogs. Read. Make lures."

"Lures?"

He nods. "There's a stream behind my house," he tells her. "I go fishing there, sometimes, when the weather's good." And the weather has been remarkably good lately. He mourns the fact that he spends so much time in Maryland, now, and hasn't been able to take advantage of it.

"Really?" She steps into the room, and Will tenses again as she comes to a halt beside him. "That sounds really fun. I've never been fishing before. Would you take me, sometime?"

Will swallows, and nods. Breathes out with a weak smile; "If your mother says it's okay." He darts his gaze over to her, and his shoulders roll. "When he can come with us, if he wants to."

She eyes him, for a long moment, and Will flinches again, going tense all over when her hand touches his shoulder. She tilts her head, hair falling to reveal the scar on her neck. "Do I make you uncomfortable, Will?"

"No," Will replies.

She smiles. "Bullshit."

"I just…" He pauses, and pushes her hand off his shoulder. "There are certain things that Alphas are…known for." He winces, growling to himself. "And the fact that your mother left you in my care is a huge gesture of trust, on both your parts. I don't want to do anything that makes you uncomfortable around me."

Abigail considers this, and gives a soft hum. Will stares resolutely down at the water, but can't make his hands move, so they're just hanging there in the warmth, fingers curled. "He told you about some of the others," she says.

Will nods. "And about your father," he replies.

"And how did it make you feel, when he told you?"

Unbidden, Will's upper lip twitches. "Angry," he confesses. "Outraged."

"Yeah, because you're a good person and that's a natural thing for good people to feel, when they hear of someone who wasn't good, who did bad things." Will blinks, and looks at her, sees her smiling in that gentle way, the same as Hannibal does when Will makes him purr. "I know you're not going to hurt me, or mama, that you want to take care of us and make us happy." Will swallows. "Right?"

"Right," Will agrees with a breathless nod.

"Then we should go fishing!" Abigail chirps, and folds her arms across her chest with a nod of finality. "This weekend, after practice. We should both go!"

Will smiles, relaxing despite himself at her obvious eagerness. "Alright," he says. "But I'm still going to ask your mother if it's alright."

"Whatever you gotta do," Abigail says with a grin and a dismissive wave of her hand. "I trust you."

And, though she cannot hear it, the words make Will's chest rumble with a loud purr.

When Hannibal wakes again, he's not alone. He stiffens immediately at the feeling of warm weight settled across his back, and snarls instinctively, for it's too heavy to be Abigail. Immediately, the sound is answered by a soft whine, a nuzzle to the back of his neck, and Hannibal freezes, breathing in.

"Will?" he whispers.

"Yeah," comes the reply, a voice that is so hoarse it's barely a word, and the scent of wine and raw meat. Hannibal turns his head, sees that same familiar mess of wild hair, those lovely, icy-blue eyes that are marred by a thick ring of red. Will's scent is strong, mint and lemongrass stinging his sensitive nose.

Hannibal doesn't understand. How is Will here? How did he find them? He's sure Abigail wouldn't have told him where they were.

Will smiles, looking so supremely happy at being here, even as Hannibal merely blinks at him. His arms tighten around Hannibal and he lowers his head, pressing his cheek to his shoulder. His body moves in a frantic, shaken sob, and his fingers curl.

"I'm sorry," he whispers. "I'm so sorry."

"Will, what are you doing here?" Even as he comes to awareness, he feels the fog fade from his head, his body responding positively to the presence of the man it has chosen as a mate, without Hannibal's permission. Will's hands shake, clutch at his arms, and that's when Hannibal notices the blood.

"I brought you something," he says.

Hannibal breathes in. Beneath Will's scent is something feverish, something that Hannibal hasn't smelled in such potency since the day Garrett Jacob Hobbs attacked him. His stomach clenches in anticipatory unease, and he's very aware that Will has him pinned to the couch, and could do grievous harm as he is.

But Will rises, and tugs on him, pulling him upright. "Come with me."

Hannibal obeys, unresistant as Will's hands brush over his wrists, up his arms, smearing blood that is flaky and drying on his skin. His mouth, too, is red on the inside, and he reeks, overwhelmingly, of a fresh kill. Of the sweet wine Hannibal altered to tug at Will's instincts and make him associate them with pleasure and home.

They go to the patio, and it's daytime again, and Hannibal doesn't like that he lost so much time, was so unaware for so long. Abigail is standing out on the patio, and she looks at Hannibal and Will with wide eyes as they emerge.

Hannibal meets her eyes, and then his gaze drops. There is, in the middle of the open space, a body. A human body, clawed to pieces, chest hollow to reveal its silent heart. The ribcage looks like it was ripped open by bare hands, and there are teeth and claw marks on its neck. It was an Alpha, Hannibal guesses, simply by the build.

He blinks, as he recognizes the face. It's Abigail's history teacher.

"I saw him, once, when I was picking her up from school," Will says, his voice hardly better than a snarl as he clings to Hannibal, nuzzling his shoulder, petting over his chest. "Heard some of her friends talking about how he was fucking one of his students."

Hannibal's lip twitches, rises.

Abigail nods. "It's true," she says. "I know the girl."

"You killed him," Hannibal breathes. "Because he caused offense."

Will nods.

"I know you don't need me," he says, weak and wanting. "You don't need me to protect you, to keep you safe. I know it was all a cover, but I don't think it was a lie." Hannibal turns to look at him, the heat of Will affecting him as he meets the Alpha's wide eyes. "I know it was real. I know what I'm feeling is real, and I don't want to lose that. I can't -."

His fingers twitch, rise, and he touches Hannibal's jaw with utmost gentleness.

"I can't lose you," he breathes. "Either of you."

Hannibal swallows, and pulls away from him, going to the body. Despite the fact that the drive from Abigail's school to here is several hours, it looks perfectly preserved, the chill of the air meaning the meat is still good. He kneels down and fits his hands into the cool chest cavity, wrapping around the heart, and, with a weak snarl, he pulls it free.

He stands, and Abigail comes forward to lift the body. After a moment Will helps her, and they take it to the edge of the cliffs, throwing it over. Hannibal remains, holding the heart in his hands, staring down at it. There is a storm coming, soon, and it will wash away the bloodstain, and they will be able to come clear away what the rain doesn't do.

He is, in a word, overwhelmed. His eyes lift when Will approaches him again, shoulders low to expose his neck, eyes down, every bit as sweet and deferential as he's always been. Never, in all of Hannibal's manipulation and planning, could he have predicted Will would react like *this*.

He swallows again, and holds the heart out to Will, and Will takes it, cradling it as though afraid he will crush it if he holds it too tightly. He meets Hannibal's eyes, desperate, yearning in them, and lets out a soft, low whine.

"I want to stay," he whispers, quiet as a prayer.

Hannibal nods, and tries to calm the howling in his head that roars, *Stay, stay forever.* "We have much to discuss," he says, and Will nods. Abigail comes to him, and Hannibal wraps an arm around her shoulders, pulling her close. "Come, let's go inside."

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

please note the updated rating and tags!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The water is cool, rushing swiftly around their thighs, the sun shining brightly as Will carefully guides Abigail's hands through attaching the lure to the line. "Wrap the leader around the tippet," he tells her, and her brow is creased in concentration as she obeys. "Four, five, six times. There you go. Tuck the end between the lines…"

He takes it from her, pulling the line tight. "Tighten," he says, "and trim." He finishes with a smile, handing the rod back to her. "It's called a blood knot."

She grins at him.

"My father would take me hunting, when I was a kid," she tells him. He cocks his head to one side, and wonders if she ever remembers him with fondness – her voice isn't warm, isn't cold either. She speaks like she's explaining the rules of lacrosse to him – factual and flat. "Fishing is different though, isn't it? One you stalk, the other you lure. One you catch, the other you shoot."

Will smiles, and lifts his shoulders in a shrug. On the bank of the river, Hannibal sits on a large plaid blanket brought from Will's house – they ended up waiting until he returned from his conference, since he seemed interested in the idea of joining them. Will's dogs trot around the riverbank, nosing curiously at plants and any rodents they find. Winston is laid out on the blanket, dozing lazily, one of Hannibal's hands petting idly through his scruff.

"I've always found the idea of hunting animals…unfair," Will says. "We're smarter than they are."

"You hunted people instead," Abigail says, and looks up at him. Her eyes shine in the sunlight, reflecting the clear water, as pale and blue as his own. She could have been his daughter, he thinks, in another life – they share enough physical likeness that people would not think twice.

Will nods. "I did."

"I liked hunting," she says. "My father said it's like an act of worship, taking their life and their flesh. If you use every part of them. Otherwise it's just murder."

Will's brows lift, and she meets his eyes again. "Do you feel the same about fishing?"

Will swallows, and shrugs again. "It's different, I suppose," he says, tucking her hair behind her ear before he casts his eyes out, watching the bubble and movement of the stream. "Like you said – we make lures, and we sit, and we wait. It's up to the fish to decide if what we offer is enticing enough to lose their life over."

Abigail laughs – a sweet, happy sound. "I see," she says, grinning. "So they consent to die."

Will huffs, and rolls his eyes. "Last thing," he murmurs, and corrects her grip on the handle of the fishing rod. "Before casting a line: name the bait on your hook after somebody you cherished."

Her brows lift. "To say 'Goodbye'?"

"If the person you name it after cherished you, as the superstition goes, you'll catch the fish," Will tells her with a smile. "I used to name every lure after my mother, and he never failed me."

"Oh." She blinks, and looks down at her line, before she flicks it back, and then forward, and they both watch as the lure plops against the surface in the water, the little pod of air floating down. She didn't throw it very far, but the current is strong enough to take it where, beneath the water, he can see the shining scales of their quarry.

He breathes out. "What did you name it?"

She smiles at him, her cheeks turning pink, and murmurs, "Will."

Will stands, at the end of the kitchen counter, watching as Hannibal prepares the heart he brought. It's Will's kill, it was his hunt, a severe desire in his chest to chase and hunt, to sate his mate and his daughter, to provide for them. A feeling he had stubbornly tried to bury back in Louisiana, and he's glad that, the way his job worked, once the arrest was made and the confession signed, he never had to see the son of a bitch who hurt another person ever again.

Now, he's no better. No better than them, no better than the people he put behind bars – except, no, because he did it for a good reason. Didn't he? They probably thought so too – he knows they did, unable to hide the seeping stain of their emotions, their reasoning, from invading and blackening his mind. Of course, of course, you had to kill her, she rejected you. Of course, you had to hurt that Alpha, because he was evil, and only you could see it. Of course, *of course*, you had no choice but to beat your mate to death; he was cheating on you, you couldn't let that slide. If you couldn't have him, no one could.

Hannibal pauses in his work, looking up at Will, and Will's eyes snap to his, his entire body stiffening and straightening, ready to do whatever his mate asks of him. There's still blood in his teeth, staining his hands, still a heavy clench in his stomach that protests the wine and raw meat, but can ignore that; he'll do whatever Hannibal wants.

Hannibal eyes him, and he looks much better than even half an hour ago. When Will came to the cabin, Hannibal was pale and sick with fever, the bitter scent of Omega distress heavy in the air, and what could Will do, but flatten himself over his mate, gently smothering as Alphas are wont to do, and hope Hannibal was soothed beneath his weight and scent?

Of course, of course, he had no other choice.

Now, though, Hannibal's eyes are sharp, and his hands don't shake. He looks back down at the heart, and carries on, stuffing spices and seasoning into the hollow cavities of the ventricles and atria, removing the cartilage that holds the aorta and pulmonary artery.

"How did you find us, Will?" he asks.

Will swallows, licks his lips, looks down at his fidgeting hands. They burn, robbed of his mate's warmth, and he's standing so close and Will feels hollowed out, split open, desperate for Hannibal to come into his arms and sink into his chest, so Will's ribs can keep him safe. Even though Hannibal doesn't need him to be safe.

"I went to Jack," he murmurs. Hannibal closes his eyes, sighing through his nose. "Pretended I wanted to help him with the Ripper case again. He left the room for long enough for me to find your file, and it listed this place as a second residence."

His shoulders lift. "Then I took a cab to my house, got my car, and drove here." He pauses, and nods at the heart, "After making a small detour."

He flinches, at the sound of Hannibal's rough exhale – scolding. "You've been drinking. You shouldn't have driven."

Will's upper lip twitches, and he looks away, glaring at the corner of the kitchen island. Abigail is behind it, sitting on a chair in a mimic of the way she has so many times, but now she's looking at Will, not with affection, not with fondness, but wary uncertainty, and Will hates that she's looking at him like that. He wants to go to her, wants to wrap his arms around her and purr for her, soothe her, promise her everything is going to be okay.

"I was careful," Will merely says.

Hannibal huffs.

"Besides, you left organs behind. And wine. I wasn't going to throw it away."

Hannibal's hands go still, at that, and he lifts his head, blinking at Will in surprise. But, beneath that, a vague flicker of pleasure.

Will swallows. "I ate it all," he says. "I couldn't risk anyone finding it."

Hannibal's head tilts.

"Is that a risk?" he asks, carefully.

Will shakes his head – no, *no*, he'd never betray them like that. "I didn't tell anyone," he says. "I told Jack I changed my mind, that the Ripper is an Alpha, told him that he's probably based out of D.C. and hunting in Baltimore to cover his tracks. Told him that – that he's solitary, that he'll have never mated, or bonded with anyone."

Hannibal's expression doesn't change, but the sound of his soft purr is unmistakable. It settles in Will's head, makes him feel warm, and he takes a step forward before he can stop himself.

Hannibal tenses, lifts his chin, and Will ducks his head – he's shorter than Hannibal, by just enough that the action is made obvious. He chances another step forward, reaches out and brushes his fingers, so lightly, over the back of Hannibal's knuckles.

"You have the right to reject my offer," he murmurs. "To kill me, if you feel threatened by me. No one would look twice." He can feel Hannibal's eyes on his face – Abigail's, too, both of them watching, stalking their prey like a mother lion teaching her cub how to hunt. "Tell them I hurt you, I abused you, tell them whatever you want."

He sucks in a breath, eagerly tastes Hannibal's scent, presses his lips together and finally raises his eyes.

"I won't fight you."

Hannibal's eyes flash, and he lets go of the heart, his hands moving so Will can't touch him anymore, and turns, so they're facing each other fully. Will aches, he aches, *God*, how can it still hurt so bad?

"You'd offer us your life," Hannibal whispers.

Will nods. Says nothing – knows Hannibal can see on his face how openly, how desperately, he wants to belong to them. In whatever way they'll allow – he has given all of himself; his mind, his love, his heart. And he'll let them take everything else, if they want it.

Hannibal sighs, pressing his lips together, and his eyes move, briefly, to Abigail. "You know what we are," he murmurs, and Will nods again, steps closer – if he is to be met with a kiss, or with claws, he'll accept either.

"Please," he whispers, and watches Hannibal's jaw clench, his nostrils flare, his fingers tremble and curl when Will whines, gently.

"Don't try to manipulate me, Will," he says harshly, and Will flinches, stepping back with another soft sound. He doesn't call Hannibal out on his hypocrisy – he understands why Hannibal did it. Of course, of course, you let a foreign Alpha into your home. One with a history of violent immersion. You left him around your daughter – you had to be sure, of course, you had to be sure he wouldn't hurt you. That he would love you.

"I'm not going to ask you to forgive me," Will says. "Just let me stay. *Please.*"

Hannibal swallows, breathes in, the gold in his irises flaring as he catches Will's scent. He turns away with another soft noise, and gathers twine to start binding the heart.

"Go shower," he murmurs. "You're filthy."

Will flinches, nodding again, and Abigail stands. "Come on," she says kindly, and holds out her hand, and he goes to her, sagging with relief when she squeezes his fingers and gives him another fond smile. She leads him out of the kitchen, through the living room with the couch piled in blankets and stinking of Hannibal's sweat, and leads him up the stairs. There are only three doors, all open – through one, he glimpses the master bedroom, the second a smaller bedroom, and the third is a guest bathroom, which she points him towards. "I got some shampoo and stuff, you'll find everything you need in there."

"Thank you, Abigail," he breathes, and meets her eyes. "I'm sorry. I never meant to…to *reject* you, I -."

"Hey." She steps forward, and squeezes his shoulder, petting up to cup his neck. It's a gesture as familiar as it is intimate – she touches Will the same way Hannibal does, the way an Omega would be instinctively soothed, and despite the fact that Will is neither Omega nor her mother, he sighs in relief, placated under her dainty touch.

She smiles at him. "I knew you'd come back."

Like a dog. Or maybe something more precious than that. His head is warm, his eyes itching with red, and he pulls her into a hug because he can't bear not to, and she embraces him back just as tightly, burying her face in his neck as he nuzzles her hair and breathes in her sweet, earthy scent.

She pulls back with another smile, and pets over his shoulder. "Go on," she says, nudging him towards the door. "You really do stink."

Will laughs, though it's strained, and obeys without another word.

Will is almost certain they're speaking Italian, since Hannibal mentioned teaching Abigail during his second interview over dinner. He frowns down at his plate as Hannibal smiles at Abigail, rattling off another string of soft words that he doesn't understand – not even his knowledge of French is really helping, for they're both clearly fluent enough that they don't speak slowly.

So he sighs, content to simply sit and enjoy their meal. It's only his first week, after all, and he's a fast learner – even if he has to stay up studying Italian and listening to those instructional audio books, he'll get fluent enough, he's sure, to follow along, even if he can't quite join in the conversation.

There is a pause, and Will looks up to find Hannibal gazing at him expectantly. Abigail, too, but her expression is an odd mix of amused and guilty – she finds the situation funny, but speaking a language a third party doesn't know in such a closed setting, forcing isolation, is

incredibly rude, and Will hasn't known them long but he knows Hannibal has a very low tolerance for rudeness.

He remembers, in a sudden flash, that Hannibal mentioned going 'back' to Paris. He raises a brow, tilts his head, and meets Hannibal's eyes steadily.

"I'm sorry," he says, in French. "I must have lost my train of thought. What did you say?"

Abigail stifles a laugh behind her mouth, and as Will watches Hannibal, he sees the Omega's eyes flash, golden in pleasure, and his lips spread out in a wide, wide smile.

"I was asking Abigail," he returns, also in French, and Will's stomach goes tight, doing a little flip at the sound of it, the sharpness of Hannibal's smile; "when the weather gets warmer, if she would like to visit Florence with me."

"Florence," Will repeats, and takes a sip of wine. After some coaxing on Hannibal's part, he finally allowed himself to have a drink with dinner, deeming it rude to refuse the special brews Hannibal insisted he tries. And they are delicious, unnamabley sweet and heavy on his tongue. So far, he likes the blackberry one best. "That sounds nice."

"Yes," Hannibal says, still using French, and Will shivers, swallowing harshly, feeling heavy with the weight of Hannibal's and Abigail's eyes on him. Now, she is frowning, looking between them with a faintly frustrated expression.

Will hums, and looks to her, smiling faintly. "Have you ever been out of the country before?" he asks in English.

Hannibal huffs, like he's disappointed that Will isn't going to keep playing along.

Abigail grins at him. "Nope! But I want to go – mama always goes on and on about how beautiful the country is there, and the old buildings and culture. I want to see all of it."

That sounds like her. Will smiles.

"Perhaps," Hannibal adds, carefully, after a moment, "if you are still employed here, you might wish to join us."

Will blinks, his eyes widening as he stares at Hannibal. His gaze is steady, assured, and Will swallows again, his fingers tightening around his fork.

He ducks his head, giving a little, demure nod, and says, in French; "I'd like that." Hannibal's smile is wide.

Will emerges from the shower, dressed back in the clothes he came in, since he didn't give any thought to packing a spare set. They're mostly clean, though a little ragged with sweat, and there's blood on his cuffs from his kill, which he leaves unbuttoned and rolls to his

elbows, runs his hands through his wet hair, and goes back downstairs, following his nose to where his daughter is setting the table.

She looks up at him, and grins, handing him her stack of plates without a word. Will watches her leave for the kitchen, and sets them down – one at the head of the table, one on either side. The table is large and high, and the chairs look like they could double as bar stools to compensate.

There lingers in the air the scent of old blood and cooking meat, and when Abigail returns with forks and knives, Hannibal follows after, carrying three plates. He sits Abigail's down first, and Will swallows, seeing a spread array of slices of the roasted, stuffed heart, coupled with a thin brown glaze and a blended scoop of what he guesses is some kind of pureed root vegetable. Then, Hannibal places his own, and finally Will's, as Abigail leaves for one more trip and returns with water for the three of them.

Will swallows, and says, "I brought some of the wine you made me."

Hannibal's eyes flash, and his lips press together. But he nods, and Will ducks his head, and goes out to his car. Next to the plastic sheet in which he'd wrapped the body is a single bottle of his favorite blackberry wine, an unopened one he'd taken from the house.

He brings it back inside to find Hannibal has taken out two glasses, and pours them one each, setting the bottle in the middle of the table.

They all sit.

Will doesn't let himself hesitate – he didn't in eating the raw organs, and he won't delay his mate and daughter their meal. He feels them watching him, rapt and ravenous, as he slices a piece of the heart and dips it in the glaze, adds a small spread of the vegetable blend on the tip of his fork, and takes his bite. It's delicious, rich on his tongue, and he sighs, smiling, and goes for a second bite as they join with their first.

Hannibal seems similarly famished, eating more quickly than he normally does – Will understands. They're both weak, shaking with the last dregs of fever, and want to consume as many calories as possible, to help their bodies kickstart the healing process.

Will takes another drink of wine, and tastes Hannibal in it, and doesn't fight the rumble in his chest, that softens to a purr. He purrs loudly, unashamed, and Hannibal's hands go still over his plate.

He looks at Will, his eyes bright and beautifully gold, and Will manages a weak smile.

Will pauses, his head tilted as he hears a soft sniffle coming from Abigail's room. Hannibal isn't home, and won't be for another hour or so – he told Will about it, this time, and commanded he start dinner without him. He contemplates just leaving her alone to let her

work through it – sometimes it's good to just cry it out. At least, that's what his mother always said, and what Alana is always saying. But another, stronger instinct pulls at him, telling him to at least offer to soothe.

So he goes to her door, and knocks, gently. "Abigail?" he calls. "Are you alright?"

She goes silent, and there's a pause, and she says, "Yeah, I'm -." Another pause. "No."

Will swallows. "Can I come in?"

"Sure." Will opens the door quietly, finds her sitting on her bed, her eyes rimmed with red and tear tracks staining her flushed cheeks. She looks up and gives him a watery smile, her shoulders shaking, and he lets out a soothing noise, going to her bed and sitting on the edge of it.

"You don't have to talk about it," he tells her, and puts a hand over hers, both of which are clenched in the thick blankets that cover her bed. "But if you want to, I'm here."

"It's stupid," she says, and wipes fiercely at her face, huffing.

Will smiles, faint and encouraging. "It's okay to cry over stupid things," he says. "And it's okay to be affected by stupid things. But if it's important to you, it's not stupid." She swallows tightly, pressing her lips together, and sighs, blinking a few more tears free from the corners of her eyes. "What happened?"

"Nick and I broke up," she tells him, and Will frowns, idly recalling the lanky Alpha kid he'd seen speaking to Abigail a few times when he picked her up from school. She goes to an all-girls' school, but there's a unisex one across the road and Will wasn't surprised to learn of fraternization amongst the students. "He decided to tell me over text, and said he was already with Marissa because she -."

She winces, rubbing her hands over her face again, and her shoulders shake.

Will sighs, gently petting her knee. "Marissa would…?"

"She'd *put out*," she hisses, and slams her hands down with a dull thud into her lap, glaring at Will. "Just because I wouldn't have sex with him, he decides to go fuck my *best friend*, and -." She swallows again, lets out a rough, high-pitched growl. She sounds like her mother when she does it. "I don't know if I'm more mad at him, or at her. She *knew* we were dating, and she fucked him anyway. And he just…fucking *text message* broke up with me. I shouldn't even be sad about losing a guy like that, he's an *asshole*."

It's the most he's ever heard her swear, and he swallows a delighted laugh, sure that Hannibal would disapprove of it, even in a state of heightened emotion. "You're right," he tells her, and she looks at him with big, watery eyes. "He's a huge asshole, and not worth crying over, but it's okay to be sad over the loss of the good things he made you feel." She presses her lips together, and huffs. "Assuming, of course, there were good parts of the relationship."

"Yeah," she says, sighing forlornly, and tucks her hair behind her ear. "I mean, he was sweet. He was nice. He just…wanted something I wasn't ready to give up, I guess."

Later, Will would see that same boy, dissected on a table in the basement, his blood coating the floor. Even now, the idea that *anyone* would force themselves on Abigail makes him want to snarl, and he's proud of her, so proud, for standing up for herself, even if it hurts in the short term.

He tells her so; "You shouldn't give up something you're not ready to give up for the sake of a boy," he says. "Or anyone. And…and when you do find someone you want to be with like that, I promise, it's not about 'giving it up'." She looks at him, and he makes a sheepish sound, smiling weakly down at her hands. "I know it might sound like some Alpha bullshit, but when you find someone that makes you feel that good, being with them is…"

Her head tilts when he trails off. "Have you ever mated?" she asks.

Will shakes his head, curling his fingers and drawing them back. Doesn't tell her that no, he hasn't, he never thought he'd want to, but being around her, and Hannibal, settles him like nothing else can.

"I'm just saying, you deserve to wait for someone who makes you feel on top of the world. And when you get that – and I know you will – then everything that comes with it just feels…natural. Like you've been doing it all along. And that doesn't mean it's any less special, if you want it to be, but -." He pauses, swallows, his upper lip twitching back. "I guess what I want to say is anyone who makes you feel pressured into doing something you don't want to do isn't someone worth having, and *anyone* who decides to leave you because you won't 'give it up' isn't worth chasing."

She stares at him, for a long time, and Will is glad to see that the tears have stopped falling. She wipes at her face, manages a watery smile, and looks down at her lap.

"Mama doesn't really talk about relationships and sex all that much," she tells him. Will hums, shifting his weight, trying not to imagine what a sex talk from Doctor Hannibal Lecter would even be like. "I mean, he gave me the basics, Tab A into Slot B, anatomy lessons, and a weirdly detailed description of diseases and infections you could get, but the rest of it…" She shrugs. "He's been alone as long as I've known him."

Will nods, once, and ignores the little flickering ache in his chest at the thought of Hannibal being bereft of even the simplest, kindest touch, from anyone but his daughter. Hannibal is the kind of man that deserves to be touched, and praised, and worshipped for the amazing creature he is. Will decided that within a month of knowing him and that hasn't changed since.

He squeezes her shoulder, earning her gaze again. "My best friend married her wife last year," he tells her. "And even when they started dating, I saw her look so…incredibly happy. Every time I saw her it was like she brightened a thousand watts, and even more whenever she'd talk about her wife." Abigail swallows, nodding. "Find someone who makes you feel like that, and I promise, the rest comes naturally."

She smiles.

"And," Will adds, with a laugh, "if you want, you can tell me the kid's address and I'll go kick his ass for you."

"Will!" she gasps, slapping him playfully, and he laughs again, only to fall silent as she grins, and then falls into his arms, hugging him tightly. He embraces her in return, sighing and glad to scent her, smelling her scent gentle from the sharpness of decaying leaves to air that promises rain. He breathes her in, hugs her, and when she pulls back, she's smiling widely.

"I feel a lot better now, thank you," she says, and Will nods, standing with another smile.

"Good. I gotta go start dinner, so I'll be downstairs if you need anything else."

"Hey."

Will pauses at her door, turns around and meets her eyes. Finds her blushing, shifting her weight, her hands fidgeting together as she looks down, briefly, at his shoes, then back up.

"Would it be weird if I started calling you dad?"

Will blinks at her, struck breathless by the question. "No," he rasps, weakly, hardly a breath. "I mean, if you want to -." He swallows, his fingers curling by his sides. "I'd be honored, Abigail. Thank you."

She smiles, and rises from her bed, and pulls him into another tight hug. He wraps his arms around her, his nose to her hair, and breathes in deeply, and knows, when her cheek presses to his chest, that she can feel him purring.

When they are done with dinner, Will gathers the dishes and brings them to the kitchen, starting the task of washing them as he always has. He can feel Hannibal's eyes on him, the Omega darkening the doorway.

Then, very quietly; "Abigail, would you mind giving me a moment with your father?"

Will closes his eyes, swallows harshly, fights the urge to ask her, once again, to stay. If Hannibal means to kill him, he doesn't want her to watch.

Hannibal approaches him, stands at his side, and for lack of anything else to do, Will starts washing the dishes, handing them to Hannibal to dry and put away. Every time he hands a plate over, or a glass, he is so-aware of how close his mate is standing, how often their fingers almost brush. He aches, so deeply and sharply, and wishes Hannibal would just *say* something.

Then, he gets his wish, when Hannibal murmurs; "I'd like you to sleep in my room, tonight."

Will swallows, looking down at the soapy water. "It'd be easier to kill me here," he murmurs. "Or out on the porch." The rain has started, signaling the first wave of the oncoming storm, and it patters against the windows and the roof, drowning out the sound of their breathing.

Hannibal lets out a low, frustrated sound, and grabs Will abruptly, turning him with a stray splash of water, and tightens his hand on Will's chin, hard enough to make him wince, forcing their eyes to meet.

"I'm *not* going to kill you," he snarls. Will shivers, blinking rapidly, but doesn't lift his hands, doesn't try to fight his mate's touch away. Instead, it warms him, makes his head feel hot and his ribs tighten, his heart slamming against the backs of them. "You chased me here, you brought me your hunt, you -."

He stops, his teeth bared, the gold in his eyes burning bright. In his large pupils, Will sees his own red, shown in answer.

Hannibal does not gentle his grip, but he exhales slowly, and licks his lips. "If you want to be mine, Will, then you must show me."

Will swallows. Of course, of course he must. He wants to.

"I know what you've done to Alphas who wanted you," he murmurs, and Hannibal's eyes flash, and his hand finally, finally gentles on Will's jaw, slides down to cup the side of his neck as he has so often before. Will's heart thrums under his skin, his wet fingers curling, dripping onto the floor. "I don't want to…cause offense. I'm not like that."

Hannibal's chin lifts, his nostrils flare, and he smiles.

"Then prove me right," he says, and moves his hand to the nape of Will's neck, tightens it, and makes another soft, pleased sound when Will doesn't even tense. How could he, when his mate is finally touching him? He'll never flinch from Hannibal again. "Show me what I saw, all those months ago; that you are good, and loving, and kind."

Will swallows again, hard enough his throat clicks, and he reaches forward with a trembling hand, feels the fever fade from his flushed skin, replaced with a different kind of heat – an urgent hunger, that demands he touch his mate, and kiss him, and aches for the scent of his slick and the pressure of his teeth.

He takes Hannibal's free hand, and lifts it to his mouth. Kisses his knuckles, and watches Hannibal's eyes darken. He grips Will's neck tightly, turns him, and guides him out of the room, the sink full of water and the single remaining wine glass left abandoned.

It is with reverent hands that Will is led to Hannibal's bedroom, the air stale and lacking the Omega's scent as Hannibal pulls him in and closes the door behind them. He presses Will to it, cups his face, and kisses him.

Will lets out a weak sound of relief, sliding his hands to curl gently on Hannibal's strong back, letting Hannibal push against him, their bodies pressed tight, as Hannibal licks into his mouth and shares the taste of wine and meat. It's a heady feeling, consumes Will like fire, and he moans as Hannibal's hand rakes through his hair, the other remaining on his blushing cheek, and grips his hip firmly, guiding him to grind against Hannibal's offered thigh.

He gasps, lets out another weak sound, breathes in and tastes Hannibal's slick in the air – so sweet, like his wine, like his smile, and he aches, deeply, his stomach heavy and sitting like a tight knot, low.

"I want to take care of you," he whispers, the play talk coming to him easily, though he's sure Hannibal needs neither the talk nor the sentiment. Still, he smiles, and nuzzles Will's red neck, breathes him in and lets out a pleased purr when he scents Will, unmarred by blood, smelling only of himself.

"Come," he murmurs, and pulls Will from the door, guiding him to the large, wide bed that is adorned with sheets of swirling blue and gold – colors Omegas are naturally attracted to, as it matches the ring in their eyes and blue promotes a sense of calm and security in them. He steps back, leaves Will trembling and panting, standing by the end of it, and lifts his chin. "Bare yourself to me, darling."

Will nods, obeying with shaking hands. Not even thirty years ago, it was a Federal mandate that Omegas remain unclothed when in their own home, even if their Alpha had guests over. Hannibal is old enough to remember that, to know the significance of what he's asking. But Will sheds his clothes eagerly, wanting so desperately to appease and please his mate, and he shrugs off his shirt, pushes his jeans and underwear down to his ankles and steps out of them.

Hesitates, just for a moment, before pulling off his shoes and socks, and folding all the clothes, placing them in a neat pile on the floor at the foot of the bed.

Hannibal's eyes brighten with pleasure, and he rakes Will up and down, ravenous, his lips parting as he takes in another deep inhale. Then, his hands go to his own shirt, unbuttoning and shedding it to reveal a broad, tanned chest, a smattering of dark hair on it that leads down in a thin trail to where his suit pants sit low. Will swallows, his mouth wet with saliva, every instinct in him demanding he lunge for Hannibal, take him and turn him and mount him.

He remains where he is. Watches, rapt, as Hannibal folds his shirt and places it on a little table behind him. He bends down to pull off his socks, balling them up and setting them atop his shirt, and Will whimpers when he makes no further move to undress himself.

Hannibal's eyes snap to him, and he lets out a low growl, and Will shivers, petting over his neck – he can't stop doing it in Hannibal's presence, from the moment he met him, and he sees Hannibal's shoulders loosen and lower at the familiar sight.

"Try to keep your sounds to a minimum," Hannibal tells him.

"Too manipulative?" Will replies.

Hannibal merely smiles, and turns his attention to shedding his suit pants. "Even before I began hunting, I inherited powerful instincts from my mother," he says. "I have a history of reacting negatively to Alphas, when I think they're trying to take something from me."

Will nods, knowing this. Of course. He thinks of black widows and praying mantises, and wonders if he'll still have his head at the end. Finds he doesn't much care, for even a moment of knowing Hannibal this intimately is better than the days they spent apart.

Hannibal folds his suit pants, leaving himself only in underwear, which are black and cling tightly to his hips, his strong thighs, his body thick with age and power. Will swallows back another low sound, drags nails over his own neck, and as Hannibal pulls his underwear off, too, baring himself fully, Will's nostrils flare and he takes in a greedy, ragged breath, able to smell Hannibal – slick, warm, wanting. He wants Will, he cannot deny that.

"If I satisfy you, you can muzzle me next time," Will breathes. Hannibal's eyes snap to him, brows rising in surprise. "Whatever makes you happy."

Hannibal smiles. "You want to make me happy, darling?"

"It's all I want," Will replies. "Whatever it takes, for the rest of my life, no matter how long that is."

Hannibal hums, and approaches him, taking Will's hand from his neck and replacing it with his own – another, sliding through Will's hair, tipping his face up. "You're still so certain I'm going to kill you," he purrs, and doesn't sound displeased by that.

Will presses his lips together so he doesn't show his teeth. "I'm not that arrogant," he replies, and Hannibal's head tilts. "Being your mate doesn't mean I get to just do what I want. It should never mean that."

Hannibal smiles, wide, and leans in, pressing another chaste kiss to Will's parted lips. "You are remarkable, Will," he breathes, and touches Will's shoulders – a brief caress that makes every muscle in Will go tense, aching for more. "I knew it from the moment we met. Still, I am surprised – you are unpredictable, at your core."

Will gasps, and Hannibal takes advantage, licking between his teeth like he did that one night, that night that has haunted Will's stomach and plagued his mind for weeks, and he cups Will's face and kisses just like he did back then, tender and warm and so, so *good*. Nothing else could possibly feel this good. Will feels invincible when Hannibal touches him.

He drags in another ragged breath, smells Hannibal's slick, and bites his lower lip hard so he doesn't whine.

Hannibal smiles, another strike of pleasure lighting up his eyes. "I suppose instinct will demand you mount me on my hands and knees."

Will shakes his head, as much as he can with Hannibal's hands on him. "I need to see you," he replies, instead of anything else – instead of saying *no*, of course not, if Hannibal doesn't

want it Will doesn't want it either. Instead of saying *no*, because Hannibal doesn't deserve to be taken like that. "I want to see you. *Please*."

Hannibal growls, pressing close to him, and pushes Will back so his knees buckle, and he falls to the edge of the bed. He crawls back as Hannibal prowls over him, settling heavy and bare on Will's thighs. He leans down, cradles Will's nape and kisses him again, rolling his hips so Will's cock ruts between his thighs, and Will moans, warm and trembling, feeling his mate slick for him.

"Will," Hannibal growls, pulling back and making sure Will's eyes are fixed on his own. "I intend to claim you. To bite you. Decide now if that's something you can live with – there's no breaking that bond, after."

Will knows that. He swallows, petting gently over Hannibal's flanks.

Says, in a ragged whisper; "My mother never mated again." Hannibal's head tilts, eyes flashing. "Until the day he died, he kept a picture of my father, and I know he longed for him every day."

He reaches up, touches Hannibal's cheek, his thumb to the corner of Hannibal's soft mouth. "I'd die before I did that to you."

Hannibal smiles. "Don't misunderstand me, darling; you'd die if you even tried."

Will can't help smiling back. "Then I offer you my life," he whispers. "All of it. Take all of me."

Hannibal leans down, claims him in another kiss, and his body moves in a graceful arch, and he reaches back, wraps a hand around Will's cock, and straightens so that he can rise, eyes closing, and sink down onto him. Omegas, when slick, also have a reflex that loosens their muscles, allowing an Alpha to mount them more easily, but even still it's considered polite to stretch them beforehand. But Hannibal doesn't hesitate, doesn't let Will protest – this is Hannibal's design, his hunt, and Will his eager victim, ready to be torn apart to sate his mate even as he pierces Hannibal in turn.

Hannibal is *hot* on the inside, so slick and tight that Will can't help moaning, tipping his head back to show his neck as Hannibal takes more of him. His hands flex, widen on Hannibal's trembling thighs, his heart flying against his ribcage like it wants to beat out of his chest and settle in Hannibal's hands, the same way Will offered the heart of his kill.

The same way Hannibal returned it, when all was said and done.

He can't help the ragged whimper he lets out as Hannibal settles on his thighs, breathing out heavily, his face a blank mask of almost surprised pleasure – Will wonders how long it's been for him, probably as long as it's been for Will, both of them too distrusting and too prone to isolation to tolerate the touch of another on them. Not without this – this bond, this thrumming heat and brilliant understanding, that stretches and snaps into place when Hannibal opens his eyes and meets Will's gaze.

He is beautiful, so terribly beautiful, like the wrath of God, a pillar of fire and salt. His hips give a slow, experimental rock and Will tenses up, huffing another soft, wanting sound, and Hannibal's hands flatten on his chest, nails digging in, watching as Will shows his neck and slides his hands to Hannibal's hips.

Then, Hannibal clamps down around him, and Will surges with a snarl, his hand flying up to cover his mouth as he tries to taper it off, whines weakly when Hannibal merely gasps and starts to move, building up a slow, aching rhythm, his cock rutting thick and wet against Will's belly.

"I'm sorry," Will gasps, trying to stifle his sounds. "Fuck, Hannibal, I -."

"Will," he breathes, and takes Will's hand away, brings it to his cock instead, encouraging Will to stroke. Will does immediately, grateful and trembling, and Hannibal smiles, eyes heavy-lidded, his scent thick and heavy with pleasure. "Don't hide your pleasure from me. I want to hear how good it feels."

Will clenches his teeth, stifles a ragged moan behind them as he strokes Hannibal's cock, watches raptly as Hannibal's shoulders curl in, his stomach sinks, his cock twitches and leaks onto Will's fingers.

And it does feel good, it feels *amazing*, having Hannibal's body take him so easily, feeling the way his muscles flex and shudder around his sensitive flesh. Knowing what he knows, seeing what he sees, he doesn't think Hannibal has ever looked more beautiful – there is a pink stain on his cheeks, a slackness to his jaw, a shine of sweat just beginning on his neck and chest that Will wants to taste. He is a predator, apex, prime, and in Will he has found someone worth this.

He moans, as Hannibal pushes his hips down, and forward, chasing the instinct to coax his Alpha into knotting him.

"Do you want it?" Will whispers. "Tell me now. I can stop."

Hannibal's eyes flash, spark brightly with outrage, and he snarls and cups Will's neck, squeezing tight enough to hurt. Will doesn't fight him, doesn't flinch. "Don't you *dare* deny me now," he growls, and shows his teeth, anger melting to pleasure when Will merely touches him, and doesn't show his own in return.

He nods, and Hannibal's touch gentles, his breath suddenly catching and his thighs tensing up around Will's hips. He growls, eyes all-black, only a thin ring of gold around them, and rears up, and Will tightens his grip on Hannibal's hip and his cock, strokes him quickly as Hannibal grinds down onto him, his lips parted in a soundless gasp as he comes, spilling thick and wet over Will's hand and belly.

Will can't resist tasting him, and brings his fingers to his lips, licking them clean and moaning when he recognizes the same sweetness that was in his wine. It sends a pulse of heat through his stomach, his body recognizing – as if it wasn't obvious before – that this is his *mate*, this man is his, all his, and fed him and touched him and housed him and made sure Will never wanted for anything.

"Please," he whispers, as Hannibal's body sags, and he plants a hand on Will's chest. "Hannibal."

Hannibal huffs. "It would be more practical for you to knot me in a different position."

"I don't *care*," Will snaps. Hannibal's eyes flash, settle on his, and his brows lift. Will touches him, with curled fingers, knuckles brushing Hannibal's red cheek. "I don't want to mount you, I don't want to own you."

He can't say more – simply falls silent, and hopes that Hannibal understands what words won't completely satisfy.

Then, Hannibal smiles, and it's an affectionate thing. "Very well," he murmurs, and cups Will's shoulders, pulling him so he's sitting upright, and Hannibal settles *heavy* on his lap, Will groaning and clenching his eyes shut as he grips Hannibal's back with blunt nails.

Hannibal pets through his hair, purring freely, sated after his orgasm, and Will shivers when that dangerous mouth kisses, open and wet, along his sweaty neck. Will's nose finds Hannibal's pulse, blindly seeking where his mate is sweetest and warmest, where his teeth will, eventually, pierce, claiming him and sealing their bond in this last irrevocable way.

Hannibal licks over his pulse, tightens his nails in Will's nape, his other hand in Will's hair, and bites. His sharp teeth sever Will's skin instantly, blood rushing up thickly, and Will cries out, trembles, and shoves Hannibal down into his lap, rutting as much as he can – though it's not much, and he senses this is by design as all the rest of it was – and his knot swells, pushing past Hannibal's slick rim, locking them together as he starts to come.

He turns his head as Hannibal sucks on his neck, a sharp bloom of pain following his bite, and Will growls, shuddering, seeking his mate's pulse. He parts his jaws, sets his teeth to Hannibal's neck -.

Freezes.

Whines, in question.

Hannibal purrs, wrapping his arms around Will's shoulders, and only parts from his neck long enough to say; "Yes, Will. You may bite."

Will sags against him, a ragged noise leaving him as he parts his jaws and sinks his teeth into Hannibal's neck – high, as custom dictates, where not even the most modest collars will hide it. The shedding of his blood and the introduction of Will's at the same time will trigger the growth of his Omega Voice faster, as Will gains his own Alpha one. Will's mouth is wet with his mate's blood, and he drinks eagerly, giving a soft, helpless whine as Hannibal growls and clings to him, hips jerking in an instinctive desire to fight off the bite on his neck. It tugs on Will's knot, reminding them both that, for the moment, neither of them are going anywhere.

Still, Hannibal is purring, and Will's chest vibrates with a rumble of his own, as he licks over the mark from his teeth, kisses Hannibal's neck, his ear, into his hair as Hannibal clings,

stubbornly, jaws locked and kneading at Will's flesh until Will is sure the scar will remain raised and red for a thousand years.

They remain like that, until Will's knot deflates and Hannibal can move from him, pressing Will down onto the bed and finally removing his teeth. Will's neck hurts terribly, enflamed along his entire throat, but he smiles, and runs a hand through Hannibal's sweaty hair, purring loud and unashamed as Hannibal nuzzles him, licks the blood from his skin – then, up, to Will's mouth, sharing the taste between them.

He hums, and pulls back. "Your diet under my care has made you very sweet." The way he says it makes Will think of Hannibal tasting other parts of him – of wrenching his ribs apart to eat his heart, of slow-roasting his thighs until they fall off the bone, of forcing Will to knot his hand and swallowing his come.

But Will doesn't say any of that – merely smiles, and murmurs, "If you like it so much, maybe you'll add it to your wine."

Hannibal's eyes flash, shining and golden and very pleased. He laughs, and leans down, their foreheads touching, noses brushing, his tongue gently touching the space between Will's parted lips.

"Oh, my dear Will," he whispers, and pulls Will close, molding to him until Will isn't sure there's a piece of him that Hannibal could not rightly claim. He pets Will's hair back from his face, flattens his hand over his bite, and presses a chaste kiss to Will's lips, until Will gasps and doesn't know if there's any air in the room besides what Hannibal provides him.

"Hannibal," he says, his voice raw, hoarse, rasping. He opens his eyes, meets those of his mate, and smiles. "Thank you."

Hannibal's head tilts, and he rolls them so they're on their sides, legs entwined, Will's hand resting, petting gently over his flank. "What for?"

"For everything, I guess," Will replies with a shrug – an action he instantly regrets, as it makes his throat ache with a sharp soreness. But he doesn't mind it – it's nothing compared to the pain of being without his mate and daughter. He has never felt pain like that.

Yet Hannibal notices, and leans in with another hum, soothing the ache with a warm kiss. "I should thank you, Will," he murmurs, pressing close. "I thought I had changed you, while remaining entirely myself. I can't possibly say that's true, anymore – and yet I think myself better for it. Happier, for having you at my side."

Will smiles, wide, and lets out a happy purr, brushing his knuckles along Hannibal's cheek. He touches his forehead to his mate's, and they fall asleep like that, curled up and warm and heavy, sated, as the fever and fog disappears from them completely.

Will wakes to the sound of the door opening, and sits upright, his neck twinging sharply, undoubtedly bruised from jaw to collarbone, to see Abigail slowly opening the door with her hand over her eyes.

"Are you guys decent?" she asks the room at large.

Will huffs, rolling his eyes as, beside him, Hannibal stirs. The mark Will left is much more polite, a thin ring of red in the shape of his teeth, and when he blinks to awareness, his lips twitch in a fond smile, and he settles a hand over Will's thigh, purring and nuzzling closer.

It's the softest, the most relaxed Will has ever seen him. He puts a hand in his hair, petting him gently, and pulls the sheets more thoroughly over them, so only his upper body and Hannibal's shoulders and head are exposed.

"Yeah, we're decent," he says.

Abigail peeks through her fingers, first, then lowers her hand with a huff. "You've been asleep *all day*," she complains. "I thought you might have died or something."

Will blinks, and looks at the clock on the bedside table, finding that it is, indeed, past two in the afternoon. The curtains in Hannibal's room are heavy, blocking all but a thin line of sunlight, and he gives her a sheepish smile, petting over the back of his neck.

Hannibal makes a very unseemly noise, his voice muffled and rasping when he says; "Bond sickness is taxing on the body, Abigail – even healing from it has many side effects such as exhaustion, loss of appetite -."

"Mama, please," Abigail says, stepping into the room and waving her hand dismissively. "Spare me the lecture. I just wanted to make sure I didn't need to get a body bag or that you hadn't run off to go…do whatever it is Alphas and Omegas do in the woods, or something."

Will blinks at her, and flushes deeply – can't stop himself thinking of chasing Hannibal through the trees, using only his nose and the tug in his chest that aches for his mate, to track him and chase him and beg for him to spread his thighs -.

He shifts his weight, clears his throat, and eyes her again. "We're alive," he says.

She nods, and folds her arms across her chest. "Well, I'm pre-emptively going to call 'B.S.' on going home right away. Clearly you need your *rest*."

Will raises a brow at her tone, and Hannibal huffs, petting his thigh. "She gets that from you," he mutters.

Will laughs, gently dragging his nails over Hannibal's scalp, until he starts to purr.

"I *also* want to inform you that it's a beautiful day, so you two should get out of bed and come enjoy it with me," she finishes, her eyes bright and her face splitting into a wide, happy smile. "If you're up for it."

Will smiles at her. "Absolutely," he replies. "Give us a minute to get decent, alright?"

She nods, and turns away with a swirl of dark hair. "Alright. I'll make coffee and lunch. Bye mom, bye dad!"

The door closes behind her, the sound of it barely covering Will's sudden, startled gasp. Hannibal pushes himself upright at the sound of it, nosing curiously at Will's neck, a soft purr breaking the silence between them.

"I…don't know if I'll ever get used to that," Will confesses, blushing when Hannibal merely hums, and licks over the bite on his neck. "I've thought of her as my daughter for a long time, but…"

Hannibal smiles. "We're her parents now, Will," he murmurs. "Both of us."

Will shivers, a quiet, happy sound spilling from him, and he turns his head, kisses Hannibal's hair, his cheek – his mouth, when Hannibal lifts his chin in offering. Hannibal purrs, and it turns into a growl, and he tugs on Will's hips, pulling him to the middle of the bed as he rises, and climbs into his lap.

Will swallows, parts his lips to let Hannibal lick between them, and says, "I don't think she'll let us stay here long enough for that."

Hannibal laughs. "She must have inherited her impatience from you."

Will blinks at him, brows rising, and he grins as Hannibal cups his face and pets through his hair. "I am *not* impatient," he says.

"Will, darling, please don't take offense to this but you are the most singularly reckless, impatient man I know."

Will huffs, but his protest is silenced by another kiss.

Hannibal rears back, considering him, his head in that perma-tilt as he meets Will's eyes. His lips press together, and he makes a soft, considering sound. "I think," he says slowly, "we should take advantage of the school break – it starts tomorrow." Will nods, knowing Hannibal took advantage of the weekend to bring her up here. Wonders, absently, what his plan would have been had Will not shown up – if they would have lingered here, for however long it took. If he would have been well enough to bring her back.

"Florence?" he asks with a smile.

Hannibal purrs, and leans in for another kiss. "Paris, this time," he replies. Adds, "I'd like you fluent in Italian, before I take you there."

Will laughs, rolling his eyes, gentle with humor as he pets up Hannibal's back. "I'd like that."

Chapter End Notes

There we have it! I hope you guys enjoyed the ride :D See you in the next fic! <3

Works inspired by this one

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!